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Prologue

A warm breeze billowed through the trees as Crowfeather lead a hunting patrol back to BloodClan's camp. The slender guard held two mice and a plump thrush in his jaws. The four of them had gone into ThunderClan's old territory to catch themselves a meal. There was no demand on fetching prey for the entire Clan, every cat was for himself... Though, as a guard with some authority, Crowfeather liked to ask if any cat wanted to hunt for a friend or kin with him. Typically, he would be one of the only cats thinking of others rather than just himself.

Most of the cats now were selfish savages. No cat seemed to have their head on straight anymore. Whether it was because they were raised like this from birth or some sort of mental illness from head trauma or a psychological break, Scourges wrath had turned the Clan-cats to bloodthirsty manics.

Scourge's death was only truly mourned by his close companions, where the rest of the cats only pretended. The small evil cat had fallen ill the past leaf-bare and even with four medicine cats working together, they weren't able to save him. His close friends had been so sure that they had purposely killed their leader, as the rumours had whispered around quite quickly. Though it *was* possible they had tried everything because they were always short on supply due to the amount of brawls that broke out daily. Not to mention how messy the battle training gets.

Soon after Firestar's death and BloodClan moving into ShadowClan's marshy home permanently, Twolegs had destroyed WindClan's vacant territory. They dug a deep pit in the heart of their camp and never touched it again. The thought of Crowfeather's home being ruined for such disgusting acts to begin still stabbed his chest. *If it wasn't for their mindless tasks, maybe Scourge would never of created this awful game...*

Scourge had ordered his slaves to dig out an entrance tunnel and at

the far side of the pit, another: the tunnel to freedom. This was only a rumour; even Crowfeather was unsure if the winner would be truly granted his freedom.

With such a hold that the small black cat with one white paw had on these feeble cats, not many cats dared to try to run away. Those that did were always found, either by the guards or the many lurking snitches. Crowfeather's shoulders bristled at the memory of him and Lostface finding Sorreltail. She only made it past the Arena on a sprained paw and battered face after she was jumped by a couple she-cats. The tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat had started wailing when she noticed the two guards were close on her tail. Sadly it wasn't hard at all to find her, the blood dripping from her face had created a trail. Crowfeather never let his emotions show, no matter how much pity he had felt for Sorreltail in that moment.

After moons of rain, wind, and sun, the pit had grown a field of grass and small trees began to grow, too. Even a thin waterfall had slithered its way over the top of the pit and down a wall of rocks that jutted out along the edge, and created a pool among the growing vegetation. Poison would sit on a lump of long logs the Twolegs had left to watch the bloody game take place from above.

Tess, Sootfur, and Mousefur followed close behind the slick black guard. None of the cats made a sound as they padded forward, each of their mouths grasping at at least one morsel. Gazing through the treetops of thick oak and birch trees, Crowfeather made note of the grey clouds slowly coming toward the cats.

Behind Crowfeather he could hear the old ThunderClan cat, Mousefur, struggling to keep up. He glanced over his shoulder and slowed his pace to watch her drop her lousy sparrow and take a moment to catch her breath.

Sootfur snorted, continuing past Crowfeather with Tess a tail-length behind him, "Old hag won't be any use for BloodClan soon enough," he flicked his tail, "Not that she ever *really* was any use." Tess purred with the smokey-gray tom.

"You don't need to wait for me," the small dusky brown she-cat grumbled before shaking out her pelt, "I am capable on my own."

Even through her prickly demeanour, Crowfeather could sense her anxiety; he knew that she knew her elder days had been upon her for moons. There were no elders in BloodClan. Back when there were four Clans, elders were taken care of and well respected... Those days were long gone.

I will always respect my elders.

Through a stern, narrowed gaze, Crowfeather let the ageing she-cat gather herself. Picking up her catch, she met eyes with the dark tom and blinked a silent thanks as the two headed to the camp. The pair trekked together among the tall ferns and rich undergrowth until they came to the Thunderpath. They ducked down and listened for a few heartbeats before scurrying over its hot black rock. Heading down the bank of the Thunderpath, Crowfeather lead Mousefur through the thin grass until their pads sunk in the wet earth, beginning to squelch in the mud. The camp was just ahead now, a clearing on dry ground surrounded by a thick barrier made of branches, dead trees, and thorns... lots of thorns. Skulls of Scourge and Poison's enemies were thrown along the camp, some were broken, some in piles, all covered in mud with flies buzzing around. Crowfeather paid no attention.

Sootfur and Tess had already began feasting on their fresh-kill by the time Crowfeather and Mousefur emerged from BloodClans entrance. Tess huddled over her catch and snarled at the large orange tom, Jumper.

Among the clearing there were cats tussling, hissing, and a few pairs engaging in small conversation. Brick and Ashfur were spitting at each other, tufts of grey and orange hair flying in the air as they batted each other with their forearms.

Under a large oak at the back of the clearing sat Russetfur and Violet on one of the large protruding roots. Their kids were at their paws squealing as their little claws hit each other. "Use your hind legs, Lionkit," Russetfur demanded as Eaglekit overpowered the small orange tabby kit, "and then give a good swipe to the nose!" Lionkit did as his mother commanded and got the bigger gray kit in the nose, sending him stumbling back with a yelp.

Meanwhile, Bumblekit, Violet's smallest, was curled under the root trembling. It looked as if he was already beaten, his fur in large tufts and a fresh claw scratch down his flank.

Brackenfur and Cloudtail were sharing a crow while watching Hawkpaw, who should've been a warrior by now, dominate a much smaller she-cat in a stand off. Heatherpaw let out a yowl as she wriggled underneath Hawkpaw's large white paws. The tabby tom's tail lashed as he growled with defiance.

Just as Crowfeather turned to head for the nursery, Onewhisker busted out of the large den where some of the warriors resided and peeled toward his daughter. "Leave her alone, you filthy rat!" He snarled, lunging at Hawkpaw which sent the two crashing into Dagger, and immediately the thick brown tabby tom spat at the two and joined in on the fight. Heatherpaw shook out her pelt and scrambled toward the medicine den for shelter.

Shaking his head, the guard broke off from Mousefur and padded to the nursery to make sure the queens had had some sort of meal today.

The nursery was practically falling apart, the back end had sunken in from past storms and he noticed streams of sunlight had broken through the den too. The guard sighed as he gazed at the three queens laying in their nests with their kits.

Crowfeather dropped his thrush at the paws of Tawnypelt, her dark tortoiseshell pelt unkempt and her hips noticeable. "Wow, it's huge!" Tigerkit gasped, him and Flamekit's heads popping up out of the nest. Dawnkit nestled closer to her mother. The three kits were big enough to eat their own food now. "This bird should be enough for you to eat as well." Crowfeather nosed the fresh-kill toward the kits and the queen dipped her head.

Ferncloud and Dawnstripe were eye-balling the two mice Crowfeather still had. He dropped each mouse at the two queens' nests.

"You are one of the last senseable cats left, Crowfeather." Ferncloud croaked.

The guard shook his head, "I know StarClan is still in a lot of these warriors' hearts..." He wasn't sure if he believed himself fully, but he knew that cats like Mistyfoot, Dustpelt, Graystripe, and Onewhisker had a hard wall up but were still good deep down... Unfortunately, he couldn't say the same for cats like Frostfur, Oakfur, Jaggedtooth, and Shadepelt.

Though the one cat whom had changed so drastically that stuck to the Clanborn cats the most was Lostface. The white and orange patched she-cat was once kind and giving, but after losing everything she turned to her rage for guidance. She was never given her real warrior name; Scourge loved how cruel the name was and how it fit perfectly with her brutal scarring. Scourge took her under his wing and taught her how to "get over it" and protect herself... and him. That sweet ThunderClan apprentice every cat had known of had been shut away. Destroyed like every cats hope for a better life. It was as if she was mind controlled, always obeyed command and showed no emotions... not even for her mate, Cloudtail... The two barely noticed each other anymore, only the white tom would awkwardly glance at her with a small glimmer of pain.

"Do you think some day StarClan will save us?" Flamekit whispered to his mother. Tawnypelt licked the fur between his ears, "I pray every night they do."

Crowfeather didn't reply as he squeezed through the brambles into the clearing. Poison was mumbling something to Jaggedtooth with Lostface and Tabby sitting with their tails neatly around their paws on the other side of him.

The leader looked up and met eyes with the black tom. "Quit babysitting the kits and get over here!" Poison snapped. Crowfeather flicked his ear as he padded toward him, "Yes, Poison?"

Above, the gray clouds had come across the sun and suddenly small drops of rain began to fall.

"Only three more sunrises before the Reaping takes place!" The rain was starting to get heavy. He kneaded the ground with anticipation and let out a purr loud enough to be heard over the drumming of

raindrops. "I want battle training for *all* of them during sunhigh and under the moonlight..." Poison trailed off with a low growl. The storm grumbled above.

The tall scrawny black leader let out a yowl and took off toward the oak tree, spraying mud behind him. He leaped for the tree trunk and clawed up to the lowest branch. Violet and Russetfur gazed up at the leader and every cat in the clearing had stopped what they were doing to watch him.

Some cats were itching to be chosen, filled with pride and deadly confidence. While other cats dreaded the day they or their kin could be chosen. Crowfeather sensed even some prayed to be chosen just to be killed, their only hope to get away from such a disgusting life.

"You all can pray..." Poison spat while he dug his claws into the branch. Thunder clouds rolled above BloodClan, and in the dim daylight the leaders piercing green eyes shone in the tree. Lowering his head, he lashed his long tail in the air, "only one will remain of a dozen... train hard, train harsh, the Arena knows no mercy...!"

BloodClan cheered with ferocious yowls and snarls at their leader. *Please StarClan, let us free...*

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i decided to completely redo this chapter but wanted to keep the old one <3 the chapters will be updated next so itll correspond properly with some of the subtle changes i had made xxx

Scourge's death was mourned by his companions, not so much anyone else. The Clan cats never liked him. They *pretended* to like him, suffering through to simply stay alive. He was greedy, selfish, and evil. Plain, plain evil. He made foolish battles that cost most cats their lives, some even their teeth or claws, and the others their faces and pelts. It was if he favored cats with intense scars. None of them looked like they had when the Clans followed the warrior code.

StarClan had officially abandoned the Clans. No dreams, signs or

prophecies after Firestar was murdered and after BloodClan moved in. Though every Clan-born cat respected and loved the elders, they were killed as soon as they became too old to fight or take care of themselves. Scourge insisted it was best for them.

Many continued to die under Poison's wrath - suffering a punishment or dying from illnesses. He was just as evil as Scourge, greedy and bloodthirsty; there was only hatred in his glowing green eyes as he towered down on the Clan with his menacing grin and threatening gaze.

Lostface, the once quiet and innocent apprentice, was now emotionless and deadly. She had never gotten her *real* warrior name, and Scourge never cared for others feelings. Because of the horrid scarring, Scourge took her under his wing, teaching her to forget the past and to "wake up". To grow up and protect herself... and him. She was officially a guard by fourteen moons; Poison's guard now that Scourge passed on. That sweet ThunderClan apprentice everyone once knew was gone. Never to be seen again. Disappeared like our hope for a better life. She always obeyed command and showed no emotions... not even for her mate, Cloudtail.

Speaking of ThunderClan, there was no more ThunderClan, ShadowClan, WindClan or RiverClan, only BloodClan remained. They were all one big Clan from the moment Scourge won and no cat, not even the kits, got along. They were always miserable and they didn't put up with anything. Even something as simple as stepping on a tail could cause a brawl.

But now that there were so many kits, apprentices, and warriors, there was a game called *The Hunger Games.* Where friend fought friend and enemy murdered enemy. Only one could be the winner, and when that winner was taken back to the territory, he or she would be given better shelter and a better place to stay, given the opportunity to no longer have to kill others or worry about being in the Hunger Games any longer. It was a one-way chance to freedom. Some itched to be chosen, while others dreaded the day.

The Reaping takes place six moons after the surviving subject had come back. And for us Clan cats, the fun had only just begun.

Cats of BloodClan

Firestar never had kits with Sandstorm, therefore the Three were never completed.

Lostface stopped caring for others, including future mate Cloudtail, therefore Whitewing was never born. Dovewing and Ivypool were never born either.

****

BloodClan:

Leader:
Poison

Deputy:
Ice

Guards:
Lostface
Blackfoot
Jaggedtooth
Crowfeather
Brambleclaw
Tabby

Medicine Cats:
Barkface
Cinderpelt
Littlecloud
Mudfur

Apprentices:

Deathpaw (Tawnypelt's son)
Icepaw (Tawnypelt's daughter)
Bloodpaw (Oakfur's son)

Hawkpaw (Hawkfrost)
Mothpaw (Mothwing)
Coldpaw (Onewhiskers son)
Haypaw (Onewhiskers son)
Heatherpaw (Onewhiskers daughter)
Dagger (Minty's son)
Silence (Minty's son)

Warriors:
Ashfoot
Ashfur
Blackclaw
Boulder
Brackenfur
Brick
Burn
Cedarheart
Claw
Cloudtail
Deadly
Dustpelt
Fang
Feathertail
Flame
Frostfur
Graystripe
Hoot
Jumper
Longtail
Loudbelly
Minty
Mistyfoot
Mousefur
Mudclaw
Oakfur
Ocean
Onewhisker
Pounce
Rainwhisker
Rowansting

Sandstorm
Shadepelt
Snake
Snapper
Snipe
Sootfur
Sorreltail
Tess
Tornear
Timber
Webfoot
Willie

Queens:
Tawnypelt: Flamekit, Tigerkit and Dawnkit.
Russetfur: Leopardkit, Lionkit, Bumblekit and Horizonkit.
Dawnstripe: Piercekit.
Ferncloud: Breezekit.
Violet: Larkkit, Gingerkit and Eaglekit.

Chapter 1 - The Reaping

The entirety of BloodClan sat amidst the Fourtrees under an open full moon. Feathertail was giving her thick light gray tabby pelt a few last licks before the Reaping began. Though apprehension prickled down her spine, it was just another day to her... Soon, twelve unlucky cats would be chosen, then the rest would head back to their muddy home and horrid lives...

Ashfoot and Rainwhisker sat beside the young she-cat. Underneath the huge trees at the front of the crowd Tabby, Brambleclaw, and Jaggedtooth were together in a line, backs straight and faces expressionless. Even though Brambleclaw was bulky with muscles, Jaggedtooth towered over him. The large ginger tom may have been huge but he wasn't much for brains.

Poison and Ice had their heads down with Lostface, Blackfoot, and Crowfeather. The handsome black tom turned to scan the crowd with his blue eyes glinting in the moonlight. Though she couldn't read Crowfeather's expression, Feathertail's face grew hot when they briefly met eyes.

"Back when there were four Clans, Gatherings would be held here." Ashfoot murmured in Feathertail's ear.

The light gray she-cat tipped her head to the side, glancing around at the huge clearing. "A gathering? Did they all have a mass fight or something? I thought they couldn't engage with different Clans!"

Rainwhisker and Ashfoot let out a low purr. "It was more of a gossip gathering in my eyes." Rainwhisker's whiskers twitched with amusement.

The sound of paws padding in behind them made Feathertail whip around. She spotted Sootfur, Rainwhisker's hot headed brother, heading toward them. The gray tom dipped his head to the other two warriors before laying eyes on the young she-cat, "Hello,

Feathertail." He purred, puffing out his chest while his amber eyes had a glint of lust.

Feathertail rolled her eyes and spat confidently, "Say another word and I'll tear your ears off!"

The tom still had a smirk on his face as he plopped down beside his dark pelted brother.

At the back of Fourtrees, Onewhisker was sitting close to his three kits. Heatherpaw was huddled under her father's front legs while Coldpaw and Haypaw sat with their chins high. The three apprentices were small and tufts of kit-fur still thickened their pelts; they were no more than five moons old. Feathertail wondered if it were different when the four Clans ruled on their own. She had been born not long before BloodClan took over.

Only a few tail-lengths away from Onewhisker sat the remaining apprentices. Deathpaw and Hawkpaw were spitting at each other in a circle, the fur on their haunches sticking up and eyes round with rage. Silence and Icepaw were whispering together with their heads close while Bloodpaw, Dagger, and Mothpaw sat just behind them.

Among the middle of the murmuring BloodClan cats were Cloudtail, Graystripe, and Sandstorm, with the small elderly she-cat, Mousefur, at their centre. Sorreltail was nuzzled in with Brackenfur. Dustpelt and Frostfur were together with their ears back and narrowed eyes watching the BloodClan leader. It was clear the old Clan cats migrated to each other while the BloodClan cats mingled alone. Feathertail noticed even back at the camp the ThunderClan cats would stick together.

Boulder, Hoot, Flame, and Snake were purring together while their piercing stares studied the Clanborn cats as they waited for the Reaping to begin. Brick and Tess sat not far from them, their tails lashing across the dirt.

"This day never gets easier," Mistyfoot's sigh came from over Feathertail's shoulder. The pale blue-gray she-cat touched noses with her daughter and took place behind her. She had never met her real mother; Feathertail wasn't interested in finding out more

about the story anyway, Mistyfoot was more than enough for her.

Feathertail let out a grunt, "I just wish that crazy cat would hurry up and get this stupid thing over with! I've barely been able to eat with all the training we've been doing."

"That training could come in use... no cat is safe tonight." Mistyfoot's icy blue eyes stared deep into Feathertail's blue gaze, making her uncomfortable. She flicked her ears and opened her mouth to respond when Poison's voice broke her thoughts.

"Cats of BloodClan..." he began with his long claws curled into the thick branch he now stood on, "welcome to another *wonderful* full moon..." Poison's voice reminded Feathertail of a snake hissing at a target, hungry for weak prey. He watched the cats below like they were greasy rats, and even so, some cats were gripping the earth below with suspense and eagerness. Others, like Heatherpaw, shied away at his intense stare.

"What a beautiful night to hold such an important gathering. I am sure your "star-cats" are begging to hear who I shall choose..." Poison paced along the branch, his thin tail lashing back and forth.

An eerie wind swirled through the night air. Feathertail felt annoyance ripple through the Clanborn cats at his nasty comment about StarClan; those reactions only fed Poison's energy. Onewhisker lifted his chin higher and Graystripe's ears flattened, flexing his claws in the dirt. Feathertail felt admiration for her kin's loyalty to StarClan despite the fact that they never intervened in Scourge's wrath.

"You know, it's funny... the winner from our previous game, Deadfoot," Poison let out a long purr, "he won with a wonky foot! I mean *come on*, what does that say for the rest of 'em!"

There were few purrs of amusement from the group of BloodClan cats.

"That old tom managed to plow through Tallpoppy and Heavystep and Mosspelt... and even Thornclaw and Stormfur..." Feathertail's shoulders flexed and her lip began to curl at the sound of her

brothers name. *Filthy vermin!* Mistyfoot's tail tip rested along her spine, calming her. "...and what was that pretty little white she-cats name again?" Poison's teeth glinted in the moonlight as he smiled straight at Onewhisker. "Whitetail?"

The brown tabby tom didn't flinch as the menacing leader snickered about his mate. Heatherpaw cowered under him, trembling.

No cat was sure if Deadfoot really was the winner. Who *really* knew if Poison was being truthful? Only *he* could view the game, there was no witness to the crazy toms claim, and Feathertail's dreams told her otherwise.

Almost every night she would wake up in a foggy dream curled up in her nest.

"Feathertail... Feathertail..."

Whispers sounding like her brother would press against her and drift off with the breeze outside. Every time she would run toward his voice, calling for Stormfur, only to get stuck in mud. She would get stuck in the thick, sticky muck and sink, his voice getting further and further away until she woke up.

The tall black leaders face went serious and met eyes with his deputy, who then scrambled up the tree trunk and stood on the opposite branch. "Ice and I have decided on the twelve lucky cats that will be chosen for our next Hunger Games,"

As the Reaping finally began, Poison's guards had started to spread out. Stalking to the edges of the crowd, Tabby, Lostface, Jaggedtooth, and Blackfoot stood on the outskirts of the crowd with their claws out in a prepared stance. The blood in Feathertail's ears were roaring.

"You all know the drill. Separate yourselves as you pathetic Clan cats once were!" Ice demanded.

Not a noise was made as they scuffled into four groups. Feathertail padded in beside Mistyfoot and the two joined the rest of the former RiverClan cats, Loudbelly, Hawkpaw, and Mothpaw. There

was a pit in her stomach as she took note of how small each of the former Clans were now, and how small they would be the following morning.

"ThunderClan, you're up first." Ice sneered, his dark amber eyes shining with malice.

Poison wrapped his tail neatly around his paws as he sat up straight. "Cloudtail." The white tom took a brief heartbeat to take it in before stalking up to the bottom of the trees to sit. Lostface didn't even so much as glance his way.

"Frostfur," Was that excitement in the she-cats green gaze? The fluffy light gray she-cat hurried to take her place beside Cloudtail. The two exchanged a couple of words as she lapped at her chest. "and Sandstorm." The pale orange she-cat nodded to the cats she had sat beside before hurrying to join the two former ThunderClan warriors.

"ShadowClan, you're up!" Poison growled, "Ashfoot, Cedarheart, Icepaw."

Inside Feathertail's chest, her heart cracked as she watched her friend trot toward the other contestants. She shook her head, *Ashfoot is strong!* but fear still gripped her heart.

"*Icepaw*." The leader repeated impatiently.

The small white-and-gray apprentice was crouched to the ground, her eyes wide with horror and shock. With the flick of Poison's tail, Tabby and Blackfoot pushed through the cats around her to snag the little she-cat. Icepaw squealed and her cries rose into the silent night as the two guards struggled to grab her. Mistyfoot looked away when Blackfoot grasped her scruff in his teeth and dragged her to where Ashfoot and Cedarheart sat emotionless.

Rowansting, her father, didn't even flinch.

"Now, without anymore *troubles*," Poison spat, glaring at Icepaw before continuing, "WindClan, you're next."

The few former WindClan cats straightened themselves as the

leader announced which one of them would be competing. "Webfoot, Haypaw, Mudclaw."

Haypaw padded to his spot first, his chin high. Then the elderly dark tabby tom and, shortly after, the muscular mottled brown tom followed in behind the proud apprentice.

"And last, but not least, RiverClan! It seems as though only a couple of you will remain... how sad." Feathertail fought to keep her pelt from bristling when Poison's eyes shined with humour at the former RiverClan cats.

"Loudbelly," the ageing dark brown tom tried to hide the struggle he experienced getting to his paws. Feathertail could feel her stomach twist at the sight.

"Hawkpaw," the dark tabby-and-white tom snickered as Poison said his name. Hawkpaw took his place beside Loudbelly, his eyes glimmering with excitement.

Feathertail's heart started to race at the sudden realisation that the odds were high that she would be chosen. The feeling of this being "just another day" had dissolved completely. *Please don't be me!* She started to feel dizzy at the thought of being thrown into the Arena to her death.

Poison's threatening eyes locked in with the light gray tabby's.

"Feathertail."

Her name didn't register at first. Glancing around, her world spinning, a ball of panic rose in her throat. Shaking her head, she stared at her paws to ground herself. Feathertail looked at Mistyfoot behind her, and then Ashfoot, who's eyes were fogged with pity. The eyes of every cat burned into her pelt.

"No, no, no! Please! I-I'm not cut out for it!" Feathertail wailed, whipping around to face Mistyfoot, "It will be okay, you just have to believe in yourself..." she whispered, nudging her forward.

Before the shocked she-cat could say anything more, Lostface and Jaggedtooth were already on either side of her. "We can do this the

easy way or the hard way." The huge ginger tom grumbled, staring down at her with his dark amber eyes. Feathertail let out a snarl and shoved past the two guards, "I can manage on my own!"

Her heart remained in her throat while taking her place beside Hawkpaw, who had a smug smirk plastered on his face. "This game is going to be easy..." He hissed, his eyes focused straight ahead. Feathertail fought to bite her tongue. *You won't be smiling when we are face to face in the Arena, you mindless frog!*

After climbing down, Poison and Ice stood at the trees base. "Blackfoot, Tabby, Brambleclaw, Jaggedtooth, take the remaining BloodClan cats back to the camp. Ice, organise repair patrols for the Arena's edge and hunting patrols so these contestants, and myself, can feast!"

The lithe white deputy dipped his head and headed off while the guards gathered the others. Feathertail turned her attention to Poison striding toward the twelve rivals, tail high and claws unsheathed. Ashfoot joined Feathertail's side as she padded over to Icepaw. The small she-cat was trying to hide her trembling legs.

"Follow me to where you will spend the night," Poison meowed while turning to lead them down a clear dirt path the opposite way the others had gone. Lostface trotted at one side of the competitors, Crowfeather on the other.

The concern started to ease for a heartbeat. *Are we going to spend the night in RiverClan's old territory?* Feathertail's belly fluttered with excitement at the thought of getting her paws wet with something other than stinky mud.

Poison's voice brought her back to reality, "In the morning, you all will have a final chance to train. Then, before you are sent off, you will feast... and by sunhigh, you will each be sent through the tunnel to the Arena. Understood?"

Murmurs of acceptance rippled through the rivals.

The group of them continued toward the river in silence. Icepaw was tense, her ears listening to every movement and eyes as wide as

an owl. "Stay close." Feathertail breathed in her ear and the apprentice blinked up at her with gratitude. Ashfoot nodded to reassure her, too.

Hawkpaw pushed past Cloudtail and then Cedarheart and ducked by Ashfoot to stand beside Poison. "I have been training for this my whole life." He stated, trotting along with pride emitting from his dark tabby fur.

Poison looked the tom up and down, "A big ego doesn't prove strength." he snickered. There were purrs among the contestants. Hawkpaw didn't respond, his tail dropping and pace slowing.

"Finally someone shot him down." Ashfoot chuckled. Feathertail's whiskers twitched with amusement, though it didn't ease Icepaw's fret at all.

The sound of the river slowly edged closer until the path lead them straight over the rushing currents. Crowfeather let the cats go ahead so he could continue at the back of the group while Lostface stuck by Poison to get over the small bridge.

Poison and Lostface paused to wait for them to cross, announcing as he waited, "Just ahead is where the contestants sleep, train, and have their final feast."

They all continued on the path.

"Now, don't get too comfortable... You are about to officially participate in... *BloodClan's Hunger Games!*"

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i rlly hope u guys enjoyed my remake... cause im enjoying rewriting it lol. stay tuned for the ch2 remake xxxxx

Poison stood on the Great Rock on the island, looking down on us like we were rats. Everyone was on their toes, pelts bristling; who wouldn't be? The Hunger Games was created by Scourge not soon after he had started ruling.

We were put to work, digging out a huge hole where WindClan had

once had their camp. Before it could be completed, Scourge had seen the twolegs working on the territories, so we set off as soon as possible, forgetting the hole and remaking it in the new WindClan territory.

That was a long, long time ago now. The hole, once a thick layer of muck, was covered in grass and was taller than any cat to ever set foot on the territory. There was one way in and one way out of the battling grounds: a tunnel. It was guarded by the finest and strongest guards of them all, and no one dared to try to get passed them... Not after what happened to one of the apprentices, Minnowpaw.

That mouse-brain thought he could do anything because he beat up a few other apprentices. The three guards actually tortured the silly tom, taking turns, and set him aside after he was gone to watch the Hunger Games go on.

I sat beside Ashfur and Cloudtail, each of them tense. I could've sworn I noticed the grey speckled tom twitch a few times. Studying him closer, I noticed his grey and black fur was groomed carefully and slicked back. I had cleaned up my fur as well, making sure no bits of fur stood up. No one was to look bad or they'd become a subject to the Hunger Games immediately.

Lostface, Blackfoot, Crowfeather, Jaggedtooth, Tabby and Brambleclaw sat below Poison, backs straight and faces blank. Ice was sitting beside Poison, also having his back straight, his facial expression hard and serious. I sighed. *This is it.*

Poison stood up on the Great Rock and studied the cats below. "I, Poison, leader of BloodClan, have decided to cancel this year's Hunger Games." He began and I gasped in relief, but something about his smile made me think something was up. Surprised and doubtful murmurs echoed around me.

"Just kidding!" He yowled and he started purring so loud even I could hear him. My eyes went as wide as an owls and my ears went flat to my skull. My hope of that this was the day he knocked some sense into himself and stopped the insanity, went dull. I knew it would never happen, and I wasn't going to mention the idea.

After purring over his own idiot joke, Poison settled down and his face went serious again. "Ice and I have decided on the 12 lucky subjects that will be going into the Hunger Games. Please separate to different places according to the Clan you were once in." Everyone drug their paws to their different groups. I followed Mistyfoot and sat down with the rest of the former RiverClan cats. I was, for once, glad that RiverClan was last in the Reaping to be called. I almost felt bad for ThunderClan.

"ThunderClan, you're first." Poison began. Everyone turned to watch ThunderClan, to see who'd be up and what they'd do. "Cloudtail." Poison announced and I quickly looked over to see if Lostface would finally show emotion. I watched her tail tip twitch but that was it.

Cloudtail looked shocked but didn't hesitate as he slowly padded to the Great Rock, sitting just below the guards. *I knew she still had feelings for him!* "Frostfur." Frostfur gasped and her eyes grew round like the moon. She shook her head but the former ThunderClan cats pushed her along, not wanting any trouble. She stalked in beside Cloudtail.

Everyone seemed to hold their breath as the leader paused. Finally, Poison continued, "Sandstorm." I could have sworn I heard sighs of relief come from their side. She didn't look frightened at the least. I mean, who would if they lost everyone they cared about? With a numb stare, the tan she-cat padded to join the others.

The three former ThunderClan cats sat below the guards and Poison looked to the former ShadowClan cats. His dark eyes glittered with excitement. "ShadowClan, you're next." Poison announced, his voice low. He always was excited for the Reaping. He thought it was fun.

"Ashfoot. Cedarheart. Icepaw." Cedarheart and Ashfoot padded to the Great Rock but Icepaw hid behind Bloodpaw. "Icepaw." Poison repeated, his voice demanding and impatient.

She still didn't come and with the flick Poison's tail, Lostface and Jaggedtooth hopped down. The small apprentice squealed and her cries rose above the silent night as the two cats fought to grab her. I saw Lostface dragging Icepaw by her scruff over the other former

ShadowClan cats. Her father, Rowansting, didn't even flinch.

"Now, without anymore troubles," He sneered, glaring at Icepaw and then continuing, "WindClan, you're next." A chill ran down my spine. *It's almost RiverClan's turn.* "Mudclaw. Haypaw. Webfoot." Poison announced and the whole side where RiverClan sat tensed. "RiverClan. You're up." My breathing started going rapid and Poison turned to us. Wind ruffled our fur and my heart hammered so loud I thought for sure someone would tell me to calm down. *I mean, the odds are I won't be chosen, right?*

"Hawkpaw." Silence ebbed after he said it, and as he padded in beside Haypaw, Hawkpaw looked quite happy. The small tom sat with his chin raised. Poison contiued, "Loudbelly." He looked over his shoulder to see if anyone was going to stop him, but everyone avoided his gaze, looking past him or simply looking to their paws. I couldn't bring myself to feel pity for the older tom.

My heart ached from anxiety. *Please don't be me, please don't be me...* "Feathertail." I gasped and I glanced around, "No, no no... please no!" I begged but everyone nudged me forward. "You'll be fine, just go and do your best." I heard Mistyfoot whisper but I shook my head and I tried to look as helpless as I could, digging my claws into the ground.

"Just go!"

"Don't make a fool of yourself..."

"You're going to get us in trouble! Pull yourself together!"

My mind was whirling so fast I couldn't pinpoint any names to the comments around me. I let out a whimper as I felt someone yank at my scruff. Knowing it was best, I stood up and cooperated.

I could feel all eyes burning into my back. Sitting beside Loudbelly, he dipped his head to me and I gave him a horrified look. "We're going for training soon. We need allies." He whispered, keeping his gaze forward, and I nodded, looking at the cats in front of me.

"Blackfoot, Tabby, Brambleclaw, Jaggedtooth, take the remaining

BloodClan warriors back to camp. Ice, make patrols for hunting." Ice nodded and leaped down, taking the lead with Brambleclaw.

Once they all filed out, Poison turned to us. "Follow me. We shall train and fill you up. The Hunger Games start tomorrow at dawn, after you eat." No one spoke, we only followed him and Lostface. Crowfeather trekked at the rear, his head low. Though we stayed quiet, I stuck to the back with Loudbelly. I looked over my shoulder at Crowfeather and he dipped his head to me. My stomach twisted and I quickly looked forward again. *I miss him*, I thought with a pang in my heart. *It's a shame I don't even remember what his voice sounds like...*

Poison took us to a tunnel and led us into a suffocating darkness. I hesitated, fighting my instinct to back up, and travelled forward until it opened to a dim space. I heard Poison's voice bounce off the walls as he spoke, "This is where you'll be sleeping. When the sun comes up, you'll be able to see better. Sleep now, training is tomorrow." He explained. I heard paws shuffling away until it wandered off, out of earshot. In the moonlight above, I watched dark figures settled down. Loudbelly brushed against my flank, and I followed him to a secluded spot. Curling up in an old nest that stank of musty leaflitter, I scanned the clearing. My eyes had adjusted by then.

I looked over to see Lostface and Crowfeather, the muscular dark shapes that stood out in the dim light, sit in the opening where we came in. I felt cold and alone, even with Loudbelly only a few whisker-lengths away.

I felt like wailing for Stormfur. *Oh, what will happen to me? Pray for me, brother... for if I win this, I will leave this territory and find you..*

Chapter 2 - Training

"It's dawn, get your haunches up!" Feathertail jolted from her sleep to the sound of Lostface's yowl. At her call Feathertail jumped to her paws. Lostface was pacing among the clearing with Crowfeather sitting just behind her as she continued, "There is a heap of fresh-kill for your feast before we start with our training sessions."

Crowfeather was sitting a few tail-lengths away, his emotionless gaze watching the group of waking cats intently. Hawkpaw was the first to dive into the pile of fresh-kill, Mudclaw coming in behind him to snag a blackbird. The young dark tabby tom hissed at Loudbelly and Webfoot as the two elderly toms neared.

"What ever happened to 'respect your elders'?" Loudbelly croaked.

With his lip curled in a snarl, Hawkpaw took a fat rabbit and darted off to a holly bush to eat by himself. Frostfur, Cedarheart, Sandstorm, Ashfoot, and Cloudtail gathered around while Feathertail and Icepaw waited for the commotion to die down.

Feathertail stifled a yawn as she extended her forepaws out in a long stretch. Fluffing out her pelt, she gave herself a quick groom. Her pelt was clumped and had nettles sticking out from the old nest she had slept in. Icepaw, still visibly shaken with shock, followed what Feathertail did by giving her ruffled fur a wash, too. Noticing her anxiety, Feathertail gave the white she-cat's ear a reassuring lick.

Ahead, the two she-cats noticed Ashfoot padding toward them with a squirrel and a magpie dangling from her jaws. Feathertail dipped her head in thanks. "My whole body is sore from this dried up nest," the silver tabby she-cat groaned before digging into the squirrel with Ashfoot, "I don't know how I'm supposed to train all day."

"You and me both..." Ashfoot murmured through a mouthful of fresh-kill.

Feathertail took the time to observe who was sticking with who as she gulped down her squirrel. Sandstorm and Cloudtail were eating beside each other, Mudclaw had joined Hawkpaw, while Frostfur sat alone giving her pelt a groom with her two finished mice at her paws.

Icepaw didn't say a word as she picked slowly at her magpie. "Try to eat as much as you can..." Feathertail nudged the magpie closer to the small she-cat, then lowered her head to make sure no other cat heard her whisper, "StarClan knows how long it will be before we get a good meal again."

StarClan was banned from being spoken about. Poison had forbidden the belief, yet Feathertail had kept her faith.

"Alright, pests! Hurry up and finish your scraps," Lostface's harsh voice sounded from beside the couple of fresh-kill pieces that remained. Licking her lips, Feathertail looked up to see Ice's bright white pelt emerging from the bridge. Poison was no where to be seen... yet. "We will break you up into groups of four, one for each training," the ginger-and-white she-cat continued, "so we can get through this quickly and painlessly..."

Ice took his spot on top of a lone boulder, his thin tail wrapped neatly around his paws and his dark gaze took time to look at each and every cat sitting below him. It took him a heartbeat to speak after Lostface had finished. Icepaw shrunk down beside Feathertail, her tail quivering.

"Let us hope this training gives you a quick insight on the *challenges*... and *struggles*... you cats will face in the field..." Ice's voice was smooth and almost hypnotizing. Hawkpaw's claws were unsheathed, ripping at the ground below him. Mudclaw, unfazed, licked a paw and drew it over his ear; Webfoot and Loudbelly looked frail only a tail-length beside the large tabby.

Pity gripped Feathertail's belly as she realized how old the two toms truly were. Gray specks on their muzzles, their hip bones jutting out, and their legs wobbled even by just sitting up. Though they looked feeble, both toms had their chins high and their eyes burned with determination.

May StarClan follow their paths... If I face them in battle, would I be able to kill them?

Realisation hit her as she glanced at Icepaw and then to Ashfoot. *Oh, great StarClan! Even if the three of us are left, I would* have *to kill them to live, too!*

Her heart started to race as Ice went on coldly, "Frostfur, Ashfoot, and Haypaw, you will start with defence training. Mudclaw, Sandstorm, and Loudbelly, you will start with shelter training. Webfoot, Feathertail, and Icepaw, you will start with medic training. Cloudtail, Cedarheart, and Hawkpaw, you will start with hunting training." Feathertail barely heard his command, her mind was racing so fast it almost made her dizzy.

"All I need is battle training! *Defence* training and *medic* training is for *kits*!" Hawkpaw hissed, slashing at the air with unsheathed claws.

Ice snickered from the boulder but didn't respond.

"Come on, Feathertail," Icepaw squeaked, bringing her back to the present, "I don't want to go without you..."

Giving her head a shake, the silver tabby led Icepaw to join Webfoot. Brambleclaw took the defence group away, Lostface lead the shelter group another way, and Tabby guided the hunting group the opposite way. Feathertail noticed the large she-cat took them toward the river.

Hope sparked in her chest, *Are we going to go swimming for one of our training sessions?* The only time she had been able to get her paws wet was as an apprentice, running off with her brother... The memory was so bright in her mind. Purring, splashing, diving under and swimming like a fish. A pang stabbed her heart. They had stayed the night on their rightful territory, and were caught the following morning by Lostface and Jaggedtooth; Poison and Ice's hateful stares shot like lightning through them when he found where they had run off to.

"You are BloodClan cats!" Poison had yowled, spitting in their faces

with rage. "Let this be a reminder..." He sneered when he chose Feathertail's brother as the first contestant. Poison found pleasure in Feathertail's wailing.

It was their decision to find the river that caused Stormfur to be chosen at the next Hunger Games as a fresh warrior. *I know you're alive out there somewhere, Stormfur.*

The trio followed Crowfeather away from the other three groups, toward the river. It took everything in Feathertail not to run past Crowfeather and jump in to the rushing currents. Not only would she get in trouble, but she didn't want to look like a newborn kit around him!

Once at the rivers edge, Crowfeather kept his eyes on the other side where the flat plateau of rocks were, once named Sunning Rocks. Following the guards gaze across the riverwas Littlecloud sniffing through different piles of herbs. "I will watch you three cross to the other side where Littlecloud awaits, then I will join you." The sleek black tom explained as the group padded closer to the river. He glanced back and caught eyes with Feathertail. Her pelt grew hot, but the tom seemed unfazed.

Flicking his tail, the guard signalled for the trio to cross.

Icepaw let out a squeal of dismay, "I-I don't know h-how to swim!" She scrambled backwards but Crowfeather came up behind her, blocking her path.

"I won't let you drown." He replied calmly.

Feathertail rested her tail tip on her shoulder and purred over the rushing water, "Wade into it until you're at your belly, and then kick your legs out... here, I'll show you!"

Without hesitation, Feathertail held her breath and dove head first into the river. The cold water was a shock at first but within heartbeats her slick pelt was used to it. Using her forepaws to turn and her back legs to push her forward, she gazed around at the riverbed: long grass waving in the current among a boulder, and startled fish hurrying away from the she-cat. The river hadn't been

used for fishing in moons upon moons; there were more fish than Feathertail could dream of! Even with a full belly, she longed for the taste of fish. Any would do.

She heard a muffled splash above her as the Webfoot's paws kicked at the surface, headed to the other side.

It didn't take long for her chest to start burning. Feathertail knew if she had been in her rightful home, she could've swam like a fish for many heartbeats but she had to swim to the surface quickly as it felt like her chest would explode.

Breaking the surface, she gasped for air and let out a joyful *mrrow*. For a heartbeat she almost forgot the real reason she was there.

Feathertail took a look around to find Crowfeather and Icepaw watching. Icepaw's eyes were filled with a mixture of amazement and relief as she called out, "Feathertail, I thought you died!"

She rolled her eyes at the young she-cat, "Get in, Icepaw! I'll guide you." Beside the white she-cat, Feathertail noticed Crowfeather's whiskers twitch. Was that amusement in his eyes?

Before she could think much of the toms reaction, Icepaw reluctantly jumped in. She let out a loud yowl just before she hit the water. Feathertail's heart lurched as she watched Icepaw's body immediately sink under and be taken down river. "Oh, great StarClan!" She spat, diving under the surface again.

As quick as a minnow, Feathertail swam with the currents toward the hurdling limp body of Icepaw. The river had swirled her small body down to the bottom of the river, catching on a reed bed. Swimming to the bottom with her claws extended, Feathertail pushed off of the riverbed and launched herself toward Icepaw. Her lungs were screaming for air. Just when she thought they were both fish food, Feathertail snagged the white she-cats scruff with her teeth and used the rest of her strength to push off of the bottom to fling herself to the surface.

Feathertail broke the surface with Icepaw in her jaws and threw themselves onto the warm rocks. Heaving and spluttering, the silver

tabby flopped onto her side with exhaustion. "We... made... it..." She wheezed, blinking out the water to get a glimpse of Icepaw. Water had pooled around her lifeless body.

Even though her hind legs screamed for her not to, she jumped up, but before she could do anything to help, Littlecloud rushed over and used his two forepaws to press onto Icepaw's upper rib. "Wake up!" Feathertail pleaded, pacing around Icepaw.

It didn't take much for Icepaw to start coughing and gagging until she brought up the water she had swallowed. "There you go, get it all out." Littlecloud insisted, watching her with concerned eyes. The young she-cat got up and stumbled, coughing out the remaining bit of water.

"You're okay! You're okay..." Feathertail comforted, licking Icepaw's pelt to warm her.

Crowfeather had already crossed to the other side, sitting back and watching with the same emotionless stare.

Rage burned beneath her pelt; the fur on Feathertail's spine spiked up and her claws ripped at the rocks she stood on. "You told her *you* wouldn't let her drown! She could've died, no thanks to you!" She snapped.

The black tom was unfazed by her threat even as she approached him with a snarl. "I knew you were a good swimmer, and she needed to learn." Crowfeather replied.

Feathertail let out a growl but before she could get any closer to the guard, Littlecloud stepped in front of her with a sympathetic gaze. "She's okay now, Feathertail," he assured the frantic she-cat, "and Crowfeather is right... The Arena is heartless..." his eyes dulled and looked beyond the silver tabby as if she was invisible, "She must know how to defend and take care of herself..."

It felt as if leaf-bare suddenly took over and she had just jumped into a frozen lake. Fear gripped her heart like a savage fox. Taking a hasty step back, she dipped her head to the dazed medicine cat.

Hurriedly, Feathertail went back to Icepaw's side to comfort the shocked young she-cat. Webfoot had taken her place, the old tom was giving her reassuring licks throughout her shoulders and flank.

"You all don't have much time before we move on," Crowfeather stated, "I would get on with it. Medic training is the most important."

Littlecloud padded over to his herbs that were stretched out on the rock as if nothing had happened. "I have most of the herbs you will come across in The Arena," he began with his back facing the three huddled contestants. Icepaw shook out her pelt, spraying Webfoot and Feathertail with cold droplets, "I will tell you their names and uses, and how to apply them. Then I want each of you to tell me five of them, each different from one another." He paused for a few heartbeats before continuing, the only noise was the rushing river behind them, "Take your time to memorize these herbs and their uses, tomorrow you will travel to the moorland where you will enter a place with no mercy... and no one to save you."

Feathertail's haunches began to crawl as if fleas had infested her pelt. Icepaw pressed herself against her, shaking. Feathertail wasn't sure if it was from her wet fur or from fear; she guessed it was both.

"Take this seriously... because you will find a lot more in The Arena than just the cats that enter by your side..."

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yet another remake! i hope yall enjoyed. hopefully the next chapter will be available sooner than it took me to do this one lmfao <3 xxxxx

Lostface's demanding voice woke me, "Get up! Food then training. Lets go." She yelled, and I immediately stood up. Loudbelly was already up, gesturing with his head for me to follow. I followed behind him and I wondered where Hawkpaw was. "Where's Hawkpaw?" I whispered to Loudbelly.

"He's hanging around with Sandstorm and Mudclaw." He replied quietly, "I think we should get Frostfur and Icepaw. Cloudtail too,

I've talked to him before; he may be heartbroken but he's also very strong." I nodded as we padded up to Icepaw and Frostfur.

Frostfur was almost an elder, but cats talked about her skill at strategies. Icepaw was always a great hunter and a silent stalker, while Cloudtail was strong and brave. *They may be good allies for us... hopefully they don't kill us in our sleep.*

Loudbelly dipped his head to the two white she-cats. I spoke for us both, sitting down in front of them, "We need allies, and we feel like you're both truth worthy." I meowed and Loudbelly took over.

"What Feathertail means is that you two seem scared and we'd like to become allies. That is, if you want allies." Icepaw and Frostfur exchanged glances and nodded, "We need all the help we can get." Frostfur murmured as she gazed thankfully at us.

I dipped my head and glanced around the bright burrow. Since the sun was up a bit, I could see what was there, other than just black blobs. Everyone around us seemed to be making allies, eating rabbits together to fill up before a day of training. Spotting the older tom with prey, I watched Crowfeather as he came up and dropped a rabbit at our paws. He didn't so much as look at me... it was like we had never met before. *What has Scourge and Poison been teaching them?* I wondered, chowing down on the plump rabbit. It was leaf-fall now, so I assumed that they caught this rabbit underground.

Loudbelly waited until Icepaw, Frostfur and I were done eating before he picked away at the remains. I found myself watching as Crowfeather and Lostface began picking up the remains of the fresh-kill and burying them. Poison came down the entrance tunnel and talked quietly with the two guards before looking up and padding away.

Raising his voice so it bounced off the dirt walls, he began the training day. "Alright! Listen here, you mange-fur rats! Today is the big day of training. Now that you've eaten and slept well, you now must train or you will *not* be prepared for the Hunger Games."

I gulped. *I have to train good and hard or I will die...* I closed my eyes

and listened, straining my ears to remember. "You can train on hunting, defence, attack or how to make shelter. I know you know how to do most of this but this training will be ten times worse, so be prepared." I opened my eyes and looked over at Loudbelly. He looked at me with a serious gaze, but his eyes turned soft and sympathetic. "Just try your best and you'll do fine." He muttered and I nodded once, turning back to Poison.

"The first tunnel is hunting, second is defence, third is attack and the forth is shelter." He meowed, flicking his ear to the large mouthed tunnels. "Now, begin your training. I will be back at dusk to see the progress." He finished and padded out of the training arena with his chin and tail high.

"Okay," Loudbelly whispered and I turned to him, Icepaw and Frostfur as well. We huddled close together and then he continued, "Icepaw, you work on your hunting, Frostfur and Feathertail go to the defence arena, I will go to the making shelter arena." Icepaw hesitated but shook her head as she padded away wearily without a word. With Frostfur at my side, we went through the wide second tunnel. It was dim in the tunnel until we came to the arena.

One of the rogues that were originally from BloodClan stood there, waiting for the subjects to come in. I looked over my shoulder and saw Webfoot, Haypaw and Cloudtail ducking out of the tunnel.

I padded up to Cloudtail and dipped my head. "Do you have any allies?" I asked and he nodded, "Ashfoot and Cedarheart."

"Alright," I responded, disappointed. *We should've went to him first.* "Besides, I've heard that you and Loudbelly are highly untrustworthy." He sneered and stalked away. I rolled my eyes and caught up with Frostfur.

"So much for getting Cloudtail on our side." I sighed in her ear and then Hoot, the rogue, stood up.

"Defence comes when you get attacked, but this way you can be prepared for attacks and you can fight better than just using your instincts." Inwardly, I groaned and tried hard to focus and remember what he was saying, but I kept thinking of Crowfeather

and all of our memories together. "You will begin with different deadly animals. Please go into the tunnel and you will be kept in there until you either kill the animal or when I think you will be killed. Try your hardest and *don't* panic."

There were 7 tunnels, more than enough with the amount of cats who came. I almost jumped out of my fur when I saw five dogs tied to some kind of vine. Hoot ran in front of them and they barked, running after him. As they followed Hoot with snapping jaws and vicious snarls, the tunnel doors slid upward. *Wow, this is so cool!* I hid my amazement and nodded once to Frostfur. She dipped her head back, her eyes serious and frightful.

I took a step toward the opening. *What does he mean by 'deadly animals'? Am I going to die here, right now?* I shook my head to clear my thoughts, slowly stalking through the tunnel and into a small arena. *How in StarClan's name did they get those dogs down here? Let alone put those weird vines around their necks?* I wondered. The burrow was pitch black but I could sense there wasn't much room to run. It was close combat practice.

I let a growl escape and unsheathed my claws, preparing for the hit of whatever was about to happen. A groan echoed through the darkness and the door behind me closed with a slam. Through the darkness, I could somewhat see another on the opposite side opened. A ferocious growl came from the tunnel and I jumped, hissing. *Another dog! They're going to kill me, and probably poor old Frostfur!*

The dog burst through the tunnel and I let out the best growl I could manage. Jumping on his back, I sunk my hind paws' claws into his fleshy skin and clawed at his face. He let out a bellow and swung is head around to attempt to get me off. Slobber splashed me, soaking my pelt and seeping through to my skin. I chomped down on his ear and he howled. There was no time to move as he swung his head around and grabbed my tail. The dog threw me into air, making me slam into the side of the arena.

The burrow was spinning fast, and my back felt like it was broken. I moved my leg and gasped, rolling out of the way just as the dog came flying at me.

Standing up, I heard him yelp as he galloped into the wall. I leaped at his hips and grabbed his tail. I tore at it with my teeth and claws and then climbed my way quickly onto his back and to his shoulders, clawing into his flesh until he yowled in pain.

He flew his head back and tried to get at me but his massive black and brown head couldn't turn all the way around like an owls could. The dog snapped at me as he swung his head around trying to grab me, and every time he did I clawed at his eyes and he yelped again, shaking his head. I bit down on his spine and dug my claws into his fur and skin. The dog bucked me off and I almost hit the top of the arena.

Just as I hit the floor on my paws, a hiss came from the tunnel the dog came from and he pricked his bloody ear. I felt like I had been fighting the hound for moons, and my body screamed at me to sleep; my back cracked as I attempted to stretch and my legs felt like I had fallen off a cliff from the clouds to the ground. *This is only the beginning of the worst, too...* The door the dog came from closed and the one I came in opened, dogs barking on the other side.

I padded out as quickly as my legs would let me. I was filled with relief when I met up with Frostfur. The white she-cat looked fine, but out of breath.

All the training cats emerged from the tunnels and then Hoot continued. "Good job. This next one will be twice as hard. But don't worry, I won't let you die." Hoot sounded tired and careless, his voice monotoned. I had a feeling he wouldn't pay attention to us and if we died, no one would actually care.

I mainly worried for Frostfur. She was already dragging her paws. My heart wanted me to beg them to take us back to the camp, but my mind knew better than to provoke trouble. Hoot let out a low groan and went in front of the dogs again, and as they chased him, the doors opened. I glanced over at Frostfur, trying to give her a reassuring look, but she kept her gaze straight. Padding into the tunnel again, I jumped as the door closed behind me, faster this time. The door in front of me opened and my worst fear came out; a fox.

I hated foxes. Nursery story after nursery story, everyone said they were evil and bloodthirsty, just like Tigerstar and Brokenstar were. Standing still out of fear, I watched through round eyes as the orange creature sniffed around. It's tail waved in the air and then he stopped. I almost screamed in fright as it yowled and came charging at me, faster than a WindClan cat could ever run.

Adrenaline surged through my body and I darted around the arena, giving me time to think.
I halted and did a back flip into the air, suddenly coming up with the only plan possible. Trick it. As I flipped over the long, slick creature, unnoticed he was in complete curiosity. It's head tilted, it watched me through narrowed, emotionless eyes. I landed behind it and before the speeding fox could get to me, I charged at it, sliding under it and attacking its stomach with unsheathed claws.

It yelped like a dog and it's head went under its chest, snapping it's sharp teeth at me. I gasped and kicked it's stomach, hooking my claws into his soft skin, I began pushing away, sliding on my back out from under it. The fox stumbled from shock but regained thought and took off with rage at me. Dirt sprayed in behind him as he tore toward me.

Bunching up my muscles, I prepared for the large fox. It bared it's glistening yellow teeth at me, rage and hunger piercing it's gaze. His lip curled in a snarl and I closed my eyes for a brief heartbeat, taking a deep breath before opening them again. Taking a few steps back, I leaped up into the air and over him, landing swiftly and running around the fox as it skidded to a halt. It turned around, racing at me as if I had his most precious possession.

My eyes widened at how determined it was and as a last resort, I jumped at the wall. Kicking off it, I slammed into the fox's red fur with my shoulder. I shoved him hard enough that he stumbled into the wall; I gagged as his pungent aroma filled my nose. It almost made my eyes water.
Just as I prepared for the orange doglike creature to turn, the door he came out of hissed and he immediately left.

I let out a sign of relief and rushed to the door I came in. The door wasn't even half way open when I squeezed under the gap and took

off up the tunnel. I saw Hoot, Crowfeather, Lostface and Poison standing there, watching me through the hole in the door. I gulped and slowly padded away, muscles aching terribly. *What are they thinking? Was Crowfeather impressed?*

Poison dipped his head as I padded past. "Great job. You are skilled when feared." Was all he said and then he left, padding out of the entrance to the main place where we slept and ate.
Frostfur met up with me, her eyes half open, but I could tell she was well exercised. "That fox was so hard to get at, the fastest I've ever seen!" She growled and I purred. "They were pretty fast. I thought for sure he'd chomp my ears off!" Frostfur purred and we sat at the nests and waited for Icepaw and Loudbelly to return.

We discussed further things about how this whole training arena was surreal: the brown vines, dogs and foxes, a huge tunnel. It didn't seem right. "I mean, how in StarClan's name did they get them down here?" Frostfur purred and I nodded, also purring. I looked over and caught eyes with Loudbelly and Icepaw.

Everyone around us seemed very chatty now that we came back from training. It was almost like we weren't going to die the following morning.

"Holy! You should've seen me, I was stalking so good, Brick actually complimented me because I was so silent! I mean, what rogue compliments Clan cats, right?" I nodded and purred, giving her a flick over the ear with my tail. It felt great to be purring again and to not be yelled at.

The main nest area was starting to go dark, meaning the sun was going down. I waited for Loudbelly to start chatting away but before he could say anything more than, "It wasn't any harder than back in the old days", Poison spoke up.

We all turned our heads to watch and listen carefully to what he had to say. It could cost our lives, you know.

"Listen up! Tomorrow at dawn, Lostface and Crowfeather will wake you up and you will a hearty meal. Then, you will set off to go to the Hunger Games arena and the Games will begin." He explained

briefly. I nodded to myself, knowing he wasn't looking at anyone in particular.

Tomorrow, at dawn, we would travel away to WindClan and start our days in a secured hole that told us, straight on, that we'd die soon. And if we managed to kill everyone else, we'd have to live with the fact that we killed cats from our former Clan.

Chapter 3 - Settling In

Thick fog swirled around Feathertail's paws and lingered around the tree trunks that she stood in the midst of. The forest was gloomy and eerily quiet. It was as if there were no moon, only a deep darkness. Feathertail's pelt bristled with alarm as she peered around the somber woodland. Her paws felt like they were frozen to the ground; she didn't dare move. The sound of crows cawing in the distance echoed through the trees and through narrow, weary eyes she watched them soar above the tree tops. It made her wonder what had frightened them into flight.

The feeling of multiple eyes watching her was starting to make her heart race. Unintelligible whispers were carried on a breeze, seemingly breathing into her ears. Feathertail unsheathed her claws, whipping around in circles with her lip curled in a snarl. She expected to face an enemy but she found nothing more than a heavy darkness.

Beneath her pads she could feel the ground beginning to vibrate. It continued to get stronger and stronger until the branches in the trees around her began to tremble. Feathertail took off in the opposite direction. She didn't want to find out what it was that could possibly be shaking the whole forest.

The silver tabby pelted through the woodland, the terror Feathertail felt being enough to mute the stinging from the bracken stems and low branches hitting her in the face. Her heart was pounding so hard she thought it would explode beneath her fur as she tore through the moonless forest, weaving between trees and thick fern bushes, all the while the ground below her continued to shake. Although she let her fear drive her, Feathertail couldn't go fast enough... whatever was chasing after her was gaining on her.

As Feathertail leaped over a rotting fallen tree with bright orange mushrooms growing along the side, she risked a glance over her shoulder. She let out a petrified scream as two large glowing eyes

and huge yellow teeth were right on her tail. It opened its jaws to let out a howl of triumph, the stench of rotting flesh wafting into her nose as it lunged for her...

Gasping for air, Feathertail jumped out of her makeshift nest and glanced around at the sleeping cats. The sun was just peeking over the horizon and the fresh-kill pile was already added to. Brambleclaw, Crowfeather, Lostface, and Blackfoot were chatting among themselves. Blackfoot and Crowfeather glanced over at the sudden noise, but didn't say anything. Blackfoot flicked his ear and continued on with the conversation.

Feathertail let out a sigh of relief. "It was only a dream..." She muttered to herself. The silver tabby stretched out her forepaws in a long stretch, unsheathing her claws and kneading them into the soft ground while working her shoulder muscles.

Icepaw was stirring in her nest, her legs twitching from a dream. Feathertail settled on the ground beside her and gave the young she-cat's head a gentle lick.

It wasn't long before Blackfoot's deep voice called to wake the sleeping cats, "Get to your paws, contestants. You are provided one last meal before we guide you to The Arena," At the sound of his voice, the cats began to awaken. Hawkpaw was the first to rush to the fresh-kill pile, his fur messy with clumps and knots. Ashfoot arched her back in a long stretch before giving herself a quick groom. Frostfur and Cloudtail did the same while the large white guard continued, "Once you are all finished, Mudfur will give each of you travelling herbs and then we will travel to the moor." Feathertail lifted her head and noticed Icepaw's wide eyes peering out from under her tail, frozen in her nest.

The small she-cat looked Feathertail in the eyes, trembling as she whispered, "Feathertail... let's just run away. When they're not looking... I don't think I can do it." Her voice started to come out as a squeal as she begged, "I-I can't do it! Please don't make me go!"

Feathertail cut her off, worried the guards would hear Icepaw's pleas, "Shh, shh," She looked around to make sure no cat had heard her and then tried to console the young apprentice, "It'll be okay,

Icepaw. You have Ashfoot and I! We won't let anything hurt-"

"That's a lie! And you know it," She cried, "Even if you manage to beat every cat... you'll have to kill *me* to win!"

Feathertail's heart wrenched. *Icepaw was never made for this.* She imagined the young she-cat walking beside her mentor, hopping excitedly through her home territory and being scolded for scaring off prey. *Icepaw should be safe at her real home with Deathpaw and Tawnypelt, learning how to hunt and practicing battle moves for her Clan, not to protect herself in some sick game.*

Touching her nose to her cheek, Feathertail drew back and met eyes with her. Icepaw's round blue eyes were glimmering with fear. Feathertail's tone was serious as she vowed, "I will not let any cat touch you. And when the time comes, we will get out together. And if not... *you* will be the winner and *you* will be free."

Icepaw took a heartbeat to take in what Feathertail had just promised her. Even though the young grey-and-white she-cat wasn't fully convinced, and still quivering, she breathed, "But I don't want you to die."

Even with her stomach twisting and her heart cracking, Feathertail swallowed the pain and the panic growing inside of her. Taking a deep breath, she touched noses with Icepaw. *One of us has to die.* Part of her wished she hadn't gotten attached to this young apprentice. After all, the one thing on her mind until then was to win and to find Stormfur... But in that moment, Feathertail knew, if and when the time came, that she would fight to the death for Icepaw. Feathertail knew her brother would have done the same thing.

Shaking her thoughts away, Feathertail beckoned Icepaw with her tail toward the small fresh-kill pile. "Now let's get a full belly before we travel." She tried to make her voice sound confident for the young grey-and-white she-cat despite the growing anxiety gnawing away in her stomach.

Together they padded toward the already picked-through fresh-kill pile. It was pitiful before, but significantly smaller by the time they

had gotten to it. The only pieces left were from the night before. Taking a stale mouse for herself, Feathertail noticed Icepaw mindlessly poking at a stiff sparrow with one extended claw, staring at the bird with a far-away look.

"You have to eat something, as gross as it may be. We are leaving soon, come on." Feathertail mewed softly. Icepaw's eyes didn't move away as she nodded and picked up the sparrow.

The two padded back to their nests where Ashfoot had finished a shrew. "Pitiful meal," She groaned, pushing away her scraps. "I would have preferred to search for my own prey."

"I agree, I should have just caught my own fish," Feathertail muttered through mouthfuls, exclaiming, "I know for a fact those guards, not even Poison, could catch even a minnow if they tried. They're frogbrains!" Ashfoot and Feathertail purred together, even Icepaw's whiskers twitched with amusement.

"I bet the guards have to fetch Poison's fresh-kill because he's such a fox-heart. Too scared of his own tail to catch his own meal..." Icepaw murmured. For the first time since she was chosen as a contestant, Feathertail noticed her eyes glint with mischief.

Ashfoot and Feathertail looked at each other and purred loudly, "I think you're right, Icepaw." Ashfoot meowed, nudging the young apprentice's shoulder with her muzzle.

As Feathertail licked her lips, she pushed away the remains of her dry mouse and gave her pelt a thorough groom. Icepaw mimicked her, licking her forepaw and drawing it over her ear before getting a knot out on her flank.

In the distance where the sun was rising over the horizon, Feathertail noticed three bodies heading toward the group of cats. From beyond the moor, the sky was bathed in a bright pink color, casting a shadow from their silhouetted forms. A chill ran down her spine as she murmured, "This is it." She sat herself in between Ashfoot and Icepaw with her tail placed over her paws. Glancing down at the young white-and-grey she-cat, Feathertail could tell Icepaw was trying to keep herself together.

Mudfur's thick light brown pelt came into view along with Barkface's dark brown pelt beside him. Poison's jet black fur and glowing blue eyes were leading the way, his long tail high above his perked ears.

The two medicine cats were each carrying a large beech leaf in their jaws. Ashfoot snorted, leaning down to her two companions, "Poison needed *two* medicine cats to come here with the herbs because he couldn't fathom to actually carry something..." Icepaw let out a purr but Feathertail was distracted by too many dreadful thoughts running through her head to react.

Her mind was racing with the realization, yet again, that she was about to be thrown into a tournament for Poison's joy. Icepaw's wails and pleading eyes echoed in her mind again, staring up at her like a kit to her mother. *If every cat just collectively decided to throw over Poison's wrath... We could learn to be four Clans again.* She knew that could never happen as she looked around to Hawkpaw who could barely sit still with excitement and to the emotionless gazes of the guards who sat in a line together. Mudclaw was kneading his claws into the ground eagerly, leaving scars in the earth. Frostfur, Cedarheart, Cloudtail, and Sandstorm all either didn't seem to care or were good at hiding their true emotions, their chins up high, eyes narrowed, and fur groomed, as the two medicine cats halted in front of the group of contestants. Loudbelly and Webfoot looked so frail beside the other competitors.

They are all too far gone. StarClan abandoned us a long time ago... There is no saving these cats now.

Dropping the bundles of herbs, Barkface and Mudfur peeled open the leaves to reveal six wraps in each bundle holding enough travelling herbs for every cat to eat. Poison took place on the lone boulder beside the group of cats, watching through slitted eyes.

"These travelling herbs will prepare you for your journey to the moorland and give you energy for your first day." Barkface announced, his half-tail slashing back and forth as he turned his head to meet the eyes of each cat. Mudfur brought his share of herbs to six of the twelve cats, dipping his head to each of them, while Barkface continued, "Chamomile strengthens the heart,

burnet will strengthen your legs, and sorrel will suppress your hunger. It should last most of your first day." As he finished, Mudfur sat a few tail-lengths away from the boulder Poison was seated on. Barkface then brought his herbs to the rest of the contestants.

Ashfoot, Feathertail, and then Icepaw were at the end of the half circle the competitors had formed. Barkface dropped the herbs at their paws as he wandered through and dipped his head to each of them. Feathertail and Icepaw were the only cats to return the gesture.

A silence hung over the group as the cats licked up the sour tasting herbs. Hawkpaw let out a groan of disgust and Feathertail noticed Icepaw shiver as she swallowed.

Poison's voice broke the eerie quiet with his sarcastic tone, "What a *beautiful* day for BloodClan's Hunger Games to start! I have *such faith* in all of you..." He paused with a purr before continuing, "Scourge would be so proud of you all. Look at all of you, so grown up and so strong..." Poison sneered, flexing his long claws against the boulder.

He leaned down against the rock, his chest fur almost touching it as he smirked. The early morning light illuminated his yellow teeth. "Shall we head out? I hope you are all prepared. I can feel it in my bones... the bitterness of battle is among you..." Poison licked his lips and his long tail lashed back and forth like a snake lunging for its prey, "Let us travel to your demise... The Arena awaits..." Something sinister flashed in his hollow blue eyes as Poison let out a deep *mrrow* of laughter.

As soon as Poison hopped down from the boulder every cat collectively headed toward the moor. Poison took the lead with his tail held high and the two medicine cats just behind him while Brambleclaw and Blackfoot padded on either side of the group. Crowfeather and Lostface travelled at the back, Lostface's head was lowered, watching the cats ahead with one narrowed eye, as she followed the group.

Feathertail could feel the herbs beginning to pulse through her body as she neared the bridge. Trotting alongside Icepaw with Ashfoot at

their tails and Webfoot and Sandstorm in front of them, they began to cross the stone walkway. The river below was loud as the water swirled below, forming foam and lapping over exposed rocks. Icepaw closed her eyes and flattened her ears at the sound of the river's current.

The group had paused on the other side of the river and once all of them had crossed, they then continued. Feathertail's gaze followed the river upstream to find it split into two at the beginning of the moorland and trailed into The Arena. Ashfoot noticed it too as she murmured over her shoulder, "Looks like you can fetch yourself a fish afterall."

It wasn't long before Poison led them out of RiverClan's old territory onto shallow peat with short shrubs and Fourtrees looming in the distance to their right, and then as they ascended up the slope they journeyed into soft heather and long, fine grass. As the contestants neared The Arena, Feathertail noticed a large pile of fallen trees on the left side, the ends severed and trunks clear of any branches. Surrounding the top of the pit were singular fallen trees laid at its edge acting as a barrier. A strange looking black-and-yellow monster sat, seemingly abandoned, at the back side of the pit. There was a long arm connected to its body with a large square paw at the end of it and short claws sticking out of its edge.

"I hope that thing stays asleep... Of all the things I can imagine in The Arena, I hope that monster isn't a part of it!" Icepaw growled, staring intensely at the large creature in the distance.

By the time the group reached the slope where the tunnel to The Arena was dug out, it was almost sunhigh. They halted at the narrow entrance and waited for instruction. Poison lowered his head with Blackfoot and Brambleclaw, muttering a few words together. Lostface and Crowfeather kept their place at the back. The sound of the long grass rustling made Feathertail turn her head to find Ice padding up to the entrance. As the white tom approached, Poison lifted his head and moved away from the guards toward the entrance.

"Welcome... to the Hunger Games Arena." Poison snickered with a smug smirk plastered across his face, flicking his tail toward the

tunnel. No cat replied, nor did they move. Feathertail's heart was beating fast; she couldn't tell whether it was the herbs she had taken or her anxiety rising.

"Now, don't all fight to get in at once." Ice scoffed with a look of amusement, stalking around the group to stand beside BloodClan's leader. Loudbelly and Icepaw straightened their posture nervously as the white tom slithered in behind them.

"Guards, show the contestants the entrance. The game is starting very shortly..." Poison's voice trailed off as he pelted up the moor toward his perch. Feathertail wondered if he sat on the monsters claw to watch the Hunger Games unfold.

Blackfoot was the first to squeeze in, while Brambleclaw and Lostface sat on either side of the tunnel entrance. Crowfeather stood behind the group of cats, moving inward as the cats started to enter. Mudclaw followed Blackfoot, then Cedarheart and Hawkpaw. Feathertail nosed Icepaw to go ahead of her and Ashfoot came in behind.

The entrance was just wide enough to fit a large cat like Blackfoot. Even Feathertail felt like she was being suffocated as she stalked through, her shoulders and flank scraping the sides of the tunnel. Her anxiety was rising with every blind paw step forward. Shuffling ahead with her nose to Icepaw's tail, it felt like moons went by before they finally broke out onto the other side... the side with only one way in and one way out... *alive*, anyway.

It took a few heartbeats for Feathertail's eyes to readjust to the bright sunlight now cascading through the treetops as it was almost sunhigh. Glancing around, she took in the short newly grown trees and open grounds. There was nearly no undergrowth, only a few clumps of bracken sprouted among the roots of the trees that stood throughout the new forest. A squirrel scurried up into a tree at the sight and scent of newcomers, chattering loudly. Feathertail could hear the river in the distance, too. Her ears pivoted to listen closer: it sounded like there was a drop where the water entered The Arena, perhaps creating a waterfall.

"Follow me down this path where you will stand in a line to wait

for Poison's call," Blackfoot announced, beckoning with his tail to follow him as he trotted down a path that winded through the tree trunks and opened up into a bright clearing. The path continued along a slope, where a cluster of mossy rocks sat atop the slope. Three beech leaves, a large rabbit, and a fresh trout were each placed on its own rock. Feathertail's mouth watered but immediately her instincts alarmed her. *It's a set up of some sort... Poison doesn't hand out anything for free.*

On another rock had a black collar with large yellow dog teeth jutting out along the band. Beside it sat what looked to be sharpened bones just big enough to slip your claws into... Feathertail fought to keep her fur flat as a shiver was cast down her spine.

Feathertail looked up into the trees, searching for his burning blue eyes but she found only thick tree tops on the outside of the clearing. *Not only does he want us to fight, but he wants it to be bloody, too!*

"Inside these bundles are some herbs you may need. Comfrey, goldenrod, lambs ear, and marigold," Blackfoot explained, pacing calmly by the rock. His voice rang among the quiet forest with confidence.

"They're used to soothe wounds, help heal wounds, give you strength, and stop infection and bleeding." Icepaw whispered to Feathertail, puffing her chest out with pride. The grey-and-white apprentice had shown her good memory skills while training, but Feathertail was more impressed that she could still remember their uses during such an intense moment.

The large white guard continued, "There are plants throughout The Arena that can be used to help heal and strengthen you. There are also places you can use for shelter through the forest." Blackfoot then dipped his head while Crowfeather, who had accompanied the back, nodded to the group of competitors. As he passed through he meowed to the group flatly, "Good luck."

Feathertail looked over her shoulder and met eyes with the tall black tom. In his light blue eyes a deep sadness shined beneath. A

pang tore through her heart like a sharp thorn. She blinked as she held her gaze with him, and he returned the subtle gesture. Feathertail's heart felt heavy as a stone while she watched the guard leave.

Together, Crowfeather and Blackfoot trotted back down the path. A silence washed over the forest.

Hawkpaw let a low growl rise in his throat, Feathertail turned her head to find his fur bristled and claws unsheathed. Webfoot's eyes were darting back and forth as each cat braced themselves for Poison's call. Feathertail could hear Icepaw panting beside her.

"When they announce the game begins, we run. Those herbs and weapons are not worth it." Feathertail whispered into Icepaw's ear. Ashfoot turned to look at them and as she met eyes with Feathertail, they dipped their head to each other, showing that she too, understood.

Suddenly, Poison's voice echoed through the forest, "Let the BloodClan Hunger Games... begin!"

Immediately the clearing was full of yowling and flying tufts of fur. Feathertail pelted away with Icepaw at her heels and Ashfoot at her left flank. She risked a glance over her shoulder, witnessing Hawkpaw lunging onto Cloudtail's back as the white tom tried to run away. Hawkpaw slashed at his neck and shoulders, screeching with triumph as his white fur stained red. Sandstorm pelted in another direction with a herb bundle clamped in her jaws, dodging Mudclaw's fury of claws toward Webfoot. The older tom was crouched down with his teeth bared, weakly swiping back at the dark brown tabby. It was clear, within heartbeats the large brown tabby had slipped on the claws. As Webfoot stood up in an attempt to swipe at his enemy harder, Mudclaw gave his throat a deadly blow. His large claws raked across Webfoot's neck causing blood to spurt out onto Mudclaw's face. Webfoot stood still for a brief moment with a shocked expression, gurgling as blood ran down his chest and pooled at his paws. Even as Feathertail continued to run, her jaw dropped in horror, she could see a smile stretch across Mudclaw's bloody face as Webfoot's body collapsed beneath him.

"Hurry! We need to find somewhere safe!" Feathertail hissed, facing the forest ahead of her.

The trio rushed through the open forest weaving around low trees and their low branches. Only a few moments of running had passed before Feathertail encountered a fallen tree with bright orange mushrooms growing along its side. Her heart skipped a beat at the familiar sight; the brightly colored mushrooms sent flashbacks of her nightmare only the night before. Leaping over the slanted, rotting wood, she thought to herself, *Please, StarClan, let this be the only thing that I see from my nightmare!*

As the three she-cats continued through the woodland, Feathertail noticed Icepaw beginning to slow down. She let herself slow to a trot where a clump of bracken stocks covered a scoop in the ground, giving a place to stay covered until they could figure out where to go next. Icepaw stumbled into the bracken and flopped onto her side, her flank heaving as she struggled to catch her breath. Feathertail's legs were weak from the long run, her pads burning just as bad as her chest. Ashfoot sat with her head bowed as she huffed, "Alright," The grey she-cat took a pause to shake out her pelt before going on, "Where should we go now?"

Feathertail lifted her nose just outside of the bracken that canopied over their heads and opened her jaws to taste the air. The only scents she could gather were the unfamiliar plants and trees of the forest. After validating no enemies were around, Feathertail then responded, "They mentioned there are different shelters around. I think we should look up high, somewhere we can cover our tracks and avoid being found as easily."

Tilting her head to the side, Ashfoot gave the silver tabby an unsure look. She snorted, "I suppose there is reason to search for shelter above."

"We'll be living with the birds!" Icepaw chimed before she sat up again.

Feathertail took a deep breath with her eyes closed before looking at Icepaw and murmuring, "We must be quiet, like you're stalking prey. I don't trust this place at night... if need be we will take any

sort of shelter before nightfall."

The amusement in Icepaw's blue eyes faded, it was as if Feathertail could see the memory of where they were flooding over her once again. Ashfoot peeked through the bracken leaves and then stuck her muzzle through their stems to taste the air. After a few heartbeats, she flicked her tail tip for them to follow.

Stalking quickly together in single form, the three she-cats travelled silently through the woodland. The she-cats kept low with Feathertail taking the lead and Ashfoot keeping an eye out at the rear. Feathertail kept her nose pointed to the sky, peering through the trees in hopes to find a tall hollowed out tree. As the she-cats continued on through spindly trees and lush bracken, Feathertail spotted a rocky slope across a clearing. At the top a large smooth boulder covered in soft green moss jutted out of its edge. Feathertail halted at the treeline. All three of the she-cats crouched down among the undergrowth before stepping out into the open. From where the silver tabby was huddled she could see just beyond the rock, finding a large gnarled oak tree in the distance. Its large branches looped and twisted up toward openings in the forest canopy, searching for every bit of sunlight its leaves could soak up. Long roots protruded out of the forest floor, holding the leaning tree in its place. The thick tree trunk was wide and starting to tilt over, exposing an opening in its wood in between the roots. Even at a distance, Feathertail could see it was hollowed out. She narrowed her eyes and stretched her neck in an attempt at getting a better view without moving.

"See anything?" Ashfoot murmured, scanning over her head through the clearing. Icepaw shuffled her paws uneasily, her ears pivoting as she strained to listen for any movement.

Feathertail poked her head out to search for any danger before opening her jaws to taste for any cats nearby. After confirming the coast was clear she then replied. "I think I found where we can settle in for the night."

Without saying anything else the three bounded across the clearing toward the rocky slope. Icepaw scrambled clumsily up with Ashfoot flanking her, using her shoulders as support while the small white-

and-grey she-cat struggled to get a grip on the steep hill. After only a few painfully slow heartbeats passed, Icepaw hopped up onto the moss covered boulder with Ashfoot close behind. Feathertail took a moment to study the treeline behind them before she climbed up after her allies.

Just as she was about to hop onto the boulder, she heard Ashfoot let out a gasp from farther into the woods. Leaping over the edge, Feathertail hurried to where the grey she-cat was standing with Icepaw at her shoulder.

As she neared Ashfoot, she caught a glimpse of what she had found. Sprawled out on her side with herbs scattered a mouse-length away and the beech leaf not far off was the body of Sandstorm. The three cats stared in shock for a few moments. It was Icepaw's whimper that broke their stunned silence. Feathertail rested her tail-tip on her shoulder and almost moved her away so she wouldn't have to see such a horrible thing... but she knew she couldn't shelter the young cat. This was only the beginning of many awful things Icepaw would most definitely witness.

Foam coated Sandstorm's grey-speckled muzzle and her milky eyes were wide open. Ashfoot padded over to the scattered herbs and with one curled claw she flicked through the leaves to discover a couple of remaining berries. Instantly Icepaw's ears shot up and her eyes widened. "Those are deathberries!" She gasped.

Ashfoot tilted her head, "I wonder why they would include deathberries with a bundle of *lifesaving* herbs... and they didn't even mention it!"

"Do you think they purposely added them to kill others... or to give cats the easy way out?" Feathertail shook her head. "I guess she'll finally be with Firestar again."

"She deserves a proper burial." Ashfoot added, gathering up the remaining herbs and carrying them a few tail-lengths away.

Feathertail agreed and started by using a forepaw to close the older she-cats eyes. The three allies then worked together to dig a leg-deep hole to place her into. By the time they finished burying

Sandstorm and sat for a short vigil, the sun was falling over the horizon. A soft orange hue could be seen in the sky from the top of the Arena wall. As the light began to fade, shadows along the west wall started to creep out of their hiding spots, almost trailing after the trio. Once they had filled the grave with dirt, Feathertail dipped her head to Sandstorms burial spot before the three silently moved on.

Hurriedly, they neared the gnarled oak tree to scope out their potential shelter. Ashfoot dropped the herb bundle on one of the oak trees' exposed roots and circled the tree while Feathertail stuck her head into the large opening at the bottom of the tree trunk. She opened her jaws to taste the air and was met with a strong musky scent thick in the air. The remnants of something rotten seemed to be deep in the old wood as well.

Feathertail ducked her head while taking a hesitant step in, her eyes narrowing to a slit to adjust to the dimly lit hollow trunk. She stifled a sneeze as she breathed in the dusty air. An opening in the trunk let a soft trail of the remaining sunlight in near the top. Just below the hole, several tail-lengths inside of the tree trunk, Feathertail noticed a ledge where one of the thick, twisting branches extended outwards. Unsheathing her claws, Feathertail lifted herself onto her hind paws and kneaded at the walls of the trunk. *Easy enough*, she thought, and wriggled her flank before leaping as high as she could. She gripped her claws into the wood and hauled herself up. Half way, she used another smaller indent from a branch to help her get up to the ledge she had found. *It may be high, but the higher the safer we will be.*

"How does it look up there?" Ashfoot's call echoed inside of the tree from the ground, her blue eyes glowing in the limited light. Frozen in disbelief at the ledge, Feathertail barely registered her voice. She took in the two stiff, empty nests and in behind, sticking out like a thorn in a paw pad, was the glint of something oddly white. "Feathertail?" Ashfoot called out again, this time sounding concerned. She must have noticed Feathertail's tail bushing inside the trunk.

"I'm okay!" She reassured the grey she-cat, pausing to take a deep breath. Laying before her was the fully intact skeleton of a cat, a

past contestant. The bones looked to be picked almost completely clean, the only thing remaining were some tufts of its long black fur lining its spine and the top of its skull. Its back was against a wall littered with scratches and a splatter of blood stained the dark wood just above its neck. "I'm going to need your help though..."

It was almost pitch black out by the time the two had grabbed the skeleton, carefully removed it from the tree, and made a separate grave beside Sandstorm's. The trio sat for another quick vigil before Ashfoot broke the silence with a suggestion, "I couldn't help but notice how much easier it was for Mudclaw with those... uh- new *accessories*, if you will."

Feathertail and Icepaw glanced over at her expectantly as she flicked her tail toward the cats' claws, "We could use these just like they're going to be. If Poison has left more bodies to rot or be picked by crows, then there will be others with this idea."

Silence followed her recommendation. Feathertail fought in her mind what the sensible thing to do could be, but they were no longer in any ordinary world.

She must have noticed the racing thoughts of uncertainty on the surface of Feathertail's face because Ashfoot continued gravely, "I think Icepaw should be the one to wear this cat's claws." Icepaw's eyes grew wide as the older grey she-cat faced her, "Honor this cat's life, and yours in turn by protecting yourself, Icepaw."

Feathertail couldn't help but understand completely where Ashfoot was coming from. *If we both die... This way she will stand a chance.*

Even though Icepaw didn't exactly look excited, she nodded. Ashfoot silently stepped down into the shallow grave and after a couple of popping sounds, she hopped back out with the two front paws dangling from her mouth. Extracting the claws from both, Ashfoot left them in front of the two small white paws of Icepaw. The small apprentice stared down at them for a few heartbeats before starting to work them into her extended claws. Feathertail and Ashfoot together kicked the loose dirt over the skeleton.

"It will grow into her easier than our grown claws, anyway."

Ashfoot mewed flatly.

Once the two had finished, Icepaw was sitting in the background with her tail neatly placed in front of her. The long claws rested on the ground below her paws. Her blue eyes cast a cold stare off into the distance. Side by side, the two she-cats padded up to her. Feathertail could sense something had changed in her demeanour.

"Do they fit?" Feathertail asked softly as they got closer.

Icepaw met her gaze with a stern nod.

"Should we hunt before we settle in? We will need to find new moss for those awful nests." Ashfoot snorted, quickly changing the subject.

"Let's just get a good night's sleep, it's been an intense day. The herbs helped suppress my hunger. I can wait if you two can." Feathertail looked down to Icepaw who only replied once again with a brief nod.

Together the three quickly stalked over to the boulder they had hopped up onto earlier, their ears flat and eyes glancing side to side as it was an exposed portion of the forest. Hurrying to peel off the thick moss, the trio grasped enough moss for each of their nests. Somewhere above in the thick of the woods through the treeline they stood near was an owl's hoots echoing in the breeze. The steep slope below the rock was almost hidden by the dense forest from the top where Feathertail stood.

While the other two took off back to the large gnarled tree, Feathertail took a moment to taste the air for enemies. Something felt off; it felt as if there were eyes watching her. The wind blew under her thick coat and to the skin. Standing there for what felt like moons, she scanned the treeline for any signs of life. Just when she dismissed her nerves, the screeching of two cats could be heard. This sudden noise made Feathertail almost leap out of her fur. Grabbing her moss, she took off toward the hollow tree where her companions waited.

Once inside, Feathertail placed her moss down and began

frantically fixing her pelt. "Sounds like someone close is in trouble." Icepaw murmured as she stood on her hind legs peering through the opening into the darkness.

"I didn't want to stand around and find out." The light grey tabby sighed and sat upright before resting her tail tip on the young she-cat's shoulders fondly, "Make your nest, I will take first lookout tonight."

Icepaw glimpsed back at her briefly and blinked in agreement before stepping back and kneading the moss into one of the old nests. There were old owl feathers scattered among the cavity they were in, so the two older she-cats let Icepaw line her nest with them. Feathertail created hers out of a nook in the wood while Ashfoot took the second old nest.

Before long, the two had settled into their new nests. Icepaw was tightly curled up with her tail resting on her muzzle and Ashfoot was snoring softly. Feathertail felt a pang of sadness grip her chest, *How are we supposed to keep each other safe when, in the end, it will be us against one another?*

Wow only took another year to remake another chapter. I know not as many people still use wattpad, let alone follow my content, but I genuinely enjoy rewriting my old works. Hope someone out there sees it, and if ya do, thanks for reading. <3 xo

I could say I had a good nights rest because I stayed asleep, but the old nest ruined that statement. After the intense training and sleeping awkwardly, my back was stiff. Even though my body silently insisted I stay asleep, being woken up by Lostface screaming at us was enough to scare me out of my nest. Grooming myself thoroughly, I was soon ready to travel and fight.

Not a lot of chatter could be heard in the main nest area, at least, not as much as last night. Crowfeather dropped a rabbit off at our feet and padded off with a second one for another group, not so much as laying an eye on me.

"I miss my trout and minnows. These rabbits have a different

texture, and I'm not sure I like it." Loudbelly mumbled, ripping the rabbits fur off and eating the meat. "You can say that again," I muttered, ripping out some meat for myself. With a mouthful of cold meat, he meowed, "Fish in general, I'd be happy." I nodded but didn't reply, focusing on the rabbit meat.

I licked my lips and, out of habit, fixed any knots I had missed. The rabbit was enough to fill my belly, but fish tasted *so* much better. If only the BloodClan rogues would try it... I couldn't remember the last time I ate fish, I realized.

"Everyone, today's the day!" Poison's excited meow echoed from the tunnel entrance and he practically skipped into the main nest area. "We will travel away to the moor and begin the Hunger Games. So be prepared, watch your back and stay alert!"

Poison turned around and led the way out the narrow tunnel and into the fresh air. I breathed it in and waited for Loudbelly, Frostfur and Icepaw before followed. Faintly, I sighed and we padded close to the rear of the group with Icepaw walking beside me and Loudbelly on the other side. The group of us trekked in silence, making our way through the territory.

The territory with trees and lots of leaflitter had the tunnel to the training arena, the camp where all of BloodClan stayed was the whole marsh and pine trees territory, while the lake and lookalike to RiverClan territory was empty.

We padded through the forest, mice and squirrels running away in a hurry along with a couple of magpies and pigeons. The forest was pretty cool looking, but I bet they never have seen the beautiful scene of the pink sky shimmering on the surface of swirling currents, to watch the river drag minnows downstream in the spring, and the astonishing sight of moonlight glistening on the water. I've sneaked out before just to swim in the lake and to watch the sun rise on the dark water; it was amazing, just to see and feel the water embrace me. It filled me with hope that one day, someone would take a stand and stop the madness of murder.

I was jolted out of my thoughts as Loudbelly shoved me with his shoulder. I glared at him and he pointed to the root that the others

were hopping over. I have him an apologetic look and kept going.

Finally, just as the sun started to fill the moor and forest with light, I stepped into the heather and long grass. It felt weird to be in a totally different territory, one that was dry instead of filled with mud. My heart longed for the reeds and stones and scales, not heather and long grass. *Though, it's better than cleaning muck from your fur!*

We weren't even two tail-lengths into the moor when I spotted the large dip in the ground, brambles and sticks making a barrier around it. The barrier was at least three times my size and was held up by thick sticks. Mini sticks were holding up the brambles where I could see and I assumed it offered an open place where prey could get through and repopulate.

I looked forward as the group halted. I watched as the group began to go underground, a sign that we were about to begin the Trials. My heart started to beat faster as my turn came up. I took a deep breath in and held my breath, letting it out in a rush as Loudbelly pushed me forward. Closing my eyes, I plunged into the darkness. My body was crammed in between the tunnel and a fluffy tail in front of me. Fighting the urge to sneeze, I stalked down the tight tunnel.

It was so dark in the tunnel that I couldn't see a whiskers-length in front of me. The tail that continuously whipped my nose could have been white, but it was grey in the pitch black. Then, the tunnel expanded and I could see a bit of light from over the cat who was in front of me, blinding me, making my heart skip a beat. Relief flooded over me as I ducked out of the suffocating tunnel.

I padded into the large field with trees covering the sky. There was a huge plank of logs above where, I assumed, Poison stood and watched. Birds chattered in the tree tops and rabbits scurried away into other tunnels, mice scurrying away at the sudden scare. I felt like I was in wonderland... living in a muddy environment wasn't all that fun when you live in it from the start. I heard water rushing by and I leaped for joy. *If this wasn't the Hunger Games arena, I'd live here forever.*

Loudbelly must've heard the water too because his eyes were filled with happiness for once. Frostfur and Icepaw seemed to be quite happy as well, looking around at the scenery and taking it in. "Finally, some fresh air other than mud and stinky swamps..." I murmured and my three allies nodded. "Indeed." Frostfur replied quietly, so quiet I wasn't sure she had actually said anything.

"Welcome, to the Hunger Games arena." Poison chuckled, gesturing with his front paw the scenery. "Once I get to the top of that Gallow, the Games will begin. Lostface, Crowfeather, tell them where to go. I will be on the Gallow when you're finished." The two guards nodded once and faced us. Before Poison went into the tunnel, Snake came through and guarded it.

"Herbs are scattered everywhere, along with prey and shelter. Stand in a line and when Poison calls down saying the Hunger Games has begun, you race off and find what you need before the sun goes down. There are things in this forest that will not hesitate to kill you and eat your flesh, so beware." Lostface warned, and a chill ran down my spine and my fur stood up. *This is it.*

This was not how I planned to die. I had planned - before Crowfeather became brainwashed - to run away with Crowfeather and never return, to go to the Tribe of Rushing Water that Stormfur had run away to so long ago... It seemed to far away as I prepared to take off.

"Line up." Crowfeather ordered and we all obeyed, standing in a waiting line, one beside the other. I relaxed my muscles as I stood in between Loudbelly and Webfoot. I unsheathed my claws and fluffed out my tail, breathing deeply and slow. I watched the wind blow through the forest. Suddenly, Loudbelly spoke, making me flinch. "Stay put." I heard him whisper to Frostfur and she repeated it to Icepaw. I dipped my head when he turned his head to me and I faced the forest again.

Poison's announcement made everyone look up, his voice echoing through the quiet dip in the moor. "Let the Hunger Games... begin!" And just like that, cats dashed away, taking off through the grass and into the forest. "Come with me!" The brown tom hissed and the three of us followed behind him.

I looked over at my side and saw cats fighting viciously for a piece of prey. They attacked for herbs, prey, and the shelter, even if the other had been there first. Blood was splattered everywhere and I had to turn away because I knew I would have nightmares for many nights after.

"Avoid all contact with others, we don't need to be killed on the first day." Loudbelly warned, slowing down at huge tree with a hole in between the roots. "I'll check it out," He meowed and the older tom stepped wearily into it. *Please don't have any dangerous animals...* I begged, waiting with Frostfur and Icepaw quietly. "Aah! Ew, get off me!" A sudden hiss from Loudbelly made me jump and just as I ran to the opening, Loudbelly came out with cobwebs all over his face.

"I was attacked by cobwebs," He purred and I sighed in relief.

"So is it good to go into and stay the night in?" I prompted and he nodded, making way for us to go in. "Frostfur, come with me to get some moss," He meowed, clawing off the cobwebs. He sneezed and the white she-cat nodded, purring.

They stalked away as soon as Loudbelly stopped sneezing and I turned to Icepaw. "Should we hunt?" She asked, the young cats' eyes wide. I nodded with agreement, "Sure. I think as soon as we are ready for the night, the better." Icepaw dipped her head and said nothing more, leading the way a little ways away from the den.

She sniffed around and then tensed up, stalking away after a crow. I got down and waited for her to come back. Watching Icepaw leap up, I swallowed a purr as she mumbled something to herself when the bird started fluttering away. Without thinking, I jumped up and hooked the bird in my claws, bringing it down in a heap of black feathers and beads of blood. "Good job!" Icepaw praised as I killed the bird with a quite nick to the neck. *I bet Stormfur does that everyday... With birds the size as cats!*

"Thanks," I meowed through feathers, bringing it back to the tree trunk. "Sorry I didn't get it... I was under pressure because I was worrying that someone was going to get it before me or that someone would kill me for it or that -" I flicked my tail, dropped the

bird and wrapped my grey and white tail around her, calming her. "Its alright, Icepaw. Don't worry, it wasn't your fault. This is new for the both of us. We'll learn to cope." I whispered to her and she rested her white head on my chest and we waited in silence for Loudbelly and Frostfur to come back.

By the time Loudbelly and Frostfur came back with moss and a mouse, Icepaw was sound asleep. Her hot breath warmed my chest and left it to be cold when she breathed in. "Is she okay?" Frostfur fretted, dropping the mouse beside the crow. She sniffed the small apprentice but quickly stopped when I responded, "She's fine, just tired."

"Lets make the nests while she sleeps." Loudbelly suggested, dropping the wad of moss in front of the entrance to the den. I slowly set Icepaw on the grass and then rushed away to help out. I entered the tree trunk and swept rocks and dirt away, making room for the moss. "We should use the crow feathers for the nests when we eat it," I mewed, my voice bouncing off the wooden walls. "Good idea," Frostfur replied, making four small nests with the big wad of moss.

I fixed up my nest and picked the crow of its feathers, lining each nest carefully with the silky black feathers. Once finished, I padded out into the dim light from under the trees. Icepaw was still asleep.

I nudged her with my nose and she shifted. "Icepaw, wake up. You have to move into the tree trunk so you don't get attacked." I whispered gently near her ear and she opened her eyes a bit. Icepaw blinked open her eyes and flinched at how close I was to her face.

"Come on, we finished the nests and you can't stay out here for the night." She nodded, standing up to wobble over to the tree trunk. I sat down and looked up, watching a squirrel jumped over head, soaring from branch to branch.

"Do you want to take guard for the night?" Loudbelly murmured, sitting beside me quietly. I looked at him and nodded, staying silent. "Alright. Frostfur is going to stay with Icepaw while I go find water. I will be back - hopefully - before dawn." He explained,

standing up again and padding away. "Okay, good luck. We can take turns guarding." I replied, standing up when he was out of sight.

I poked my head in the tree trunk and looked at the two white bundles. They were curled up together, Icepaw resting her head on Frostfur's chest. Their sides raised slowly as they breathed in the dusty scents of the hollow tree trunk. "If you need me, I will be up in the tree. I'll keep my eyes out for enemies."

Frostfur opened one eye and whispered, "Lets hope our first night doesn't end in blood."

Dipping my head in agreement, I backed out. Looking up the tall, thick tree, I groaned. *This will be some effort to get up to at least the first branch...*

Chapter 4 - A Watchful Eye

Fluffing out her thick pelt, Feathertail struggled to adapt to the rapidly cooling night air. Even in the shelter of the tall gnarled oak and its thick wood walls she could feel herself trembling. For a greenleaf night, Feathertail felt as if it could have been leafbare, and the ground should have been blanketed thick with snow, but the trees were alive and green, and the bushes were full.

It was just past moonhigh as she continued to scan the clearing that the tree stood in the midst of. With her eyes narrowed and ears flat, she sat with her eyes just above the bottom of the hole to constantly survey the ground for any signs of trouble. She shuffled her paws as she fought to get comfortable in the cold. Since the night had begun there was nothing out of the ordinary, and the steady croaking of frogs in a pond nearby was almost like a lullaby. If it weren't for the brisk night air, Feathertail thought for sure she would be fast asleep alongside her allies.

The opening in the tree faced the boulder that marked the end of the woods where it became the clearing, the area in which the three had originally came from. Feathertail watched the forest; beyond the thick of the trees she could see the tall, steep slope that lined the edge of the Arena. They weren't that far from the only exit. The night sky was clear and sparkled with stars. Her heart yearned for the connection with StarClan the elders whispered of. *Where are you now, ancestors? Is it true you've really abandoned us?* Questions loomed overhead as she stared up at the twinkling sky but she found no answer.

Feathertail stifled a yawn when the sudden sound of a branch snapping caused her to jump up onto her paws. She peered toward the loose dirt off in the distance. They had dug the graves behind a cluster of rocks jutting out of the soil off to the left, several fox-lengths away from the gnarled oak.

Her heart hammered in her chest while she unsheathed her claws, readying herself of the possibility that their scent had given their

hiding spot away.

Down below, among the rocks, Feathertail spotted the bright yellow eyes and muscular grey pelt of Cedarheart. He was well hidden in the dark as he slithered through the undergrowth surrounding the rocks. She wondered what he had been through, if he was injured... if he had killed any cat.

For a few heartbeats the tom hid in the undergrowth, making Feathertail antsy. *Does he smell our scent?* Fear crept up her spine and every moment that passed felt like an eternity.

Cedarheart passed by the two graves and then with a quick glance over his shoulders, he rushed through the clearing. The tom kept low as he hurried toward the forest past the tree Feathertail was perched on. She felt her heart rate begin to slow down once her opponent had disappeared. There was almost a pit of guilt in her stomach combating the fear she felt inside of her at the sight of the tom. It felt wrong to be protecting two ShadowClan cats while simultaneously preparing to fight off another.

Despite her feelings, Feathertail gave a sigh of relief and decided it was Ashfoot's turn to take watch.

Nudging the she-cat awake, Ashfoot silently got out of her nest and took the lookout spot for the rest of the night. Feathertail let out a soft moan as she curled up in her little nook and almost instantly fell into a slumber.

Whispers among the mist swirled around her paws as the silver tabby raced through a dark woodland. *Feathertail... Feathertail...* She tried to scream out to the familiar call but no words came. *How could you abandon me?* The whispers turned to hissing, and with each word it felt like claws scraping her body. *Feathertail... Where have you gone?* They slashed her face, her ears, her flank, her shoulder. Frantically she gazed around the forest as she ran. Suddenly, in front of her was a cliff, and before she could stop, Feathertail tumbled over the edge and was sent into a black abyss.

Feathertail opened her eyes, gasping for air. She found herself flailing in her nest. As odd as it was, Feathertail was thankful to

wake up with Ashfoot and Icepaw in the Arena rather than wherever her dreams had been taking her the past two nights.

"Well, good morning," Ashfoot teased, "We were just checking out the herb bundle Sandstorm had."

As Feathertail fixed her pelt, she responded in between licks, "What did we score, Icepaw?" She noticed that the small apprentice perked up at a chance to show her skills. In front of her were different herbs separated neatly in small piles.

"Here is some burnet, a travelling herb that will give you strength. A few dandelions that will reduce fever and give some pain relief," Icepaw began listing off what the bundle held, pointing to each pile with one long extended claw, "A good amount of goldenrod for wounds and just enough thyme for one use, this will help a cat with shock!" Her chest was puffed out with pride as she recalled the plants they found.

"You have a fantastic memory!" Feathertail praised, padding over to her and touching noses with the young she-cat. Icepaw blinked fondly at her.

Ashfoot scoffed, flicking her tail with annoyance at the small green leaves. "Oh, how thoughtful of them," she groaned, "Thyme for *shock*... But only enough for one use!"

Icepaw glanced down at the thyme and let out a purr.

A silence followed the short moment of laughter. There may be humor found in the small things, but truthfully nothing was funny about it. Feathertail could sense that the other two knew it, too. They were trapped in an arena for sport. Where your kin or your friend is to be murdered in cold blood... while Poison and his minions laugh, and probably even make bets on who will win.

If you can even call it "winning".

Shaking the thoughts from her head, Feathertail broke the silence, "We should go out and hunt. My suggestion is we grab what we can, bury a few pieces somewhere close just in case, and meet back here

before sunhigh."

Ashfoot nodded thoughtfully. "Sounds fair to me. Icepaw and I can catch some and perhaps bring some soaked moss, too. To be safe." She added, "If one of us gets injured or things get too crazy, we will have a safety net."

All three nodded at the plan. Just as they were about to leap down from the ledge, Icepaw chimed in, "What about if something happens to one of us? What if one of us gets lost, or doesn't come back?"

Feathertail and Ashfoot met eyes for a brief moment. "Fair point." Ashfoot murmured.

"Well... if one of us doesn't return by sunhigh, don't panic. The Arena is quite big and there are lots of obstacles..." Feathertail trailed off before starting again with a serious tone, "At the end of the day, we are truly alone. I wouldn't feel betrayed if either of you continued on without me."

Pain flooded in Icepaw's eyes at the possibility of the group being broken up. "If one of you doesn't come back by sunhigh, I will search for you myself!" She cried, her voice cracking.

The other two she-cats nodded in sync. "Very well, if one does not return by sunhigh, the others will search. If by nightfall there is no luck, we will come back to the tree." Ashfoot looked to each of her allies for their agreement in her proposal before continuing, "If by chance we do get separated and that cat comes back to find the shelter abandoned, it is because we were forced, and each day at sunhigh we will gather at the waterfall in an attempt to regroup. Do we all agree?"

Icepaw and Feathertail both dipped their heads before the three of them hopped down to the ground. Waiting to emerge from the shadows of the gnarled oak, Feathertail lowered her head with Ashfoot and Icepaw. "You two stick together, I will head toward the sound of the waterfall and see what I can catch for tonight."

Ashfoot's whiskers twitched with amusement, "How did I know you

would wander over to the river?" Verifying the coast was clear with a quick glance, Ashfoot meowed, "We will check for any herbs in the area and catch some fresh-kill to bury. If you're not back by sunhigh we will search for you by the waterfall."

Icepaw nestled into Feathertail's neck and mewed, "Be safe."

Nodding, Feathertail began to pad away from her allies. "I won't be long!" She called over her shoulder.

Now, let's find something good to eat. Licking her lips, her mouth watered at the thought of a sweet trout, or a tasty carp. Anything from the river would fill Feathertail's mouth with pleasure.

Feathertail hurried through the open clearing, her eyes constantly scanning the field of grass. She didn't want to stay out of cover for long and risk being seen by any of the other competitors. The early morning sunlight felt warm on her thick coat. After a long, cold night, it felt good to have the heat of the day seeping through her fur. The sky was clear of any clouds, another bright greenleaf day, and as the Arena was painted gold with the suns' rays, the world began to awaken. Birds began to sing in the trees, calling out to each other, perhaps verifying they, too, had survived the cold night. If it weren't for the constant nagging feeling of being hunted, Feathertail felt like she could almost forget she was in the Arena.

The silver tabby kept her pace at a trot until she made it into the forest; with the cover of the trees she felt it was safe enough to slow down. After tasting the air for any enemies, Feathertail trekked through the thick undergrowth. The woodland was lush and loud with the sounds of grasshoppers and cicadas buzzing in the grass. Large bushes waved softly in the calm breeze.

As Feathertail wandered quietly through the bracken and fern, she came to a slight drop in the ground. Soft moss silenced her steps as she peered over the edge of a talus. Peeking through the treetops, the sun cascaded along a group of large rocks. In between two lay a dirt path, beaten from many paws winding down to the ground below. Exposed roots stretched out and grew along the edge of the top boulder, creeping its way through the path. Quickly checking over her shoulders for any sign of another cat, she padded through

the two rocks, hopped over the root, and trotted down the path to the bottom.

Continuing forward with careful steps, Feathertail's eyes were scanning side to side in search of any prey or enemies. As she trekked through the forest Feathertail began to notice the woods were getting thicker and thicker with more shrubs, premature trees, and patches of wildflowers among the trees that stood tall. She had to weave through the greenery, pushing through the tall undergrowth that almost touched her shoulders and occasionally there would be a patch of premature pine trees racing for the canopy above that she would have to duck under. Though Feathertail felt more covered, it also gave her anxiety knowing any other cat in this part of the forest could easily stay hidden as well. With the ground cover being so thick and her being so focused on keeping an eye out for danger, the silver tabby ended up tripping over what she thought to be a tree root and tumbling into a bramble. Trying to remove herself, its branches pricked her pelt. Feathertail groaned as she shook out her coat and went to lick at her small cuts, but her annoyance was quickly replaced by shock as she noticed what she had really tripped over.

Sticking out from underneath the shade of another bramble bush lay a skeleton. Only one paw could be seen from the thick of its branches. Poking her head under the bush, golden-brown tufts of fur among some of the bones was the only indication of who it could have been. Feathertail realized it was Thornclaw, one of the contestants from the last Hunger Games. She could see the branches were now entwined along his spine and ribcage, and moss had begun to grow over the bones that sat directly on the ground. Thornclaw even had a daisy sprouting from a crack in his skull, growing up through his eye socket. The white flower stood among the white bones almost like a statement. *Poison can order our death but he cannot take away our beauty, and the beauty of nature. Even in death, there is still beauty.* She also noticed the leg that was sticking out of the brambles had a snap in its leg. Feathertail shook her head, wondering what the tom had gone through in his last moments. Starvation from not being able to hunt? Or was he hunted down as he tried desperately to limp away from danger? The thoughts about the once strong warrior pained her, but she couldn't

focus on that. She had to focus on herself and getting something to feed her and her friends.

Dipping her head in respect, Feathertail had to move on from the skeleton. Not only was her stomach growling with hunger, but she also didn't want to be too long away from her allies. *I will use his skeleton as a marker in case I get lost.* She noted to herself. With his broken leg sticking straight out from under the bush, Feathertail would know to follow the direction his paw was pointing to.

She strained to listen for the deep roar of the waterfall and the splatting of the water hitting the pool below, or the gurgling of the river's fast-flowing currents. Feathertail's ears perked up at the sound of rushing water not far in the distance. Following the sound, the silver tabby trudged through the thickening undergrowth. She found herself coming to a short, but steep, slope as the noise of the river grew louder. Feathertail descended down the small slope as quietly as she could without falling. Once she came to flat ground again, Feathertail ducked under a tall bramble and finally spotted the water only a fox-length further. She stopped at the riverbank's edge.

Only six or seven tail-lengths in width, Feathertail could tell it wasn't as deep as the one in RiverClan's old territory but it certainly was faster. Upriver she could see a large eastern cottonwood leaning heavily over the opposite side of the riverbank. Its roots were fighting to hold the tree up and its branches, lush with small green leaves, were barely over the surface of the current. Feathertail's eyes followed the water downriver a few tail-lengths, spotting a large rock close to the side she was on and another only a leap away. *The jump to the other side would require a good paw-hold, but it could be done*. Trailing down the river further she could see a rockbed at the peak of a bend in the river; this would be the only spot in this section of the river where one could stand at the water without getting in. The riverbanks were high above the water, the vegetation so thick it hung over the edge just above its surface.

Feathertail bounded through the undergrowth with excitement and skidded down the rocky slope to the flat rockbed. Rocks waked from her paws clattered down to the pebbles at the rivers edge. The fur between her pads dampened from the water that wet the rocks,

cooling her down. It was then she realized how hot the dense forest was becoming. Taking a glance up, Feathertail peered through the canopy above to see the sun making its way steadily toward its peak. *There is still plenty of time until sunhigh, yet the heat is rising so fast...* The sunlight shone through the breaks in the treetops, making the water's surface glitter as the current wisped around the bend and through the forest. Feathertail crouched down searching through the surface of the water for any fish racing by. Knowing it would take more effort, she looked to the end of the rockbed where a shallow pool was formed. She found it to be calmer with rays of sun filtering through the canopy, a good spot for fish to sit lazily. Just at the edge of the rockbed, Feathertail figured that if she waded in the pool and waited beside the current that comes around the meander, she could wait for something bigger to rush by. Her head swarmed with hunger. *I don't care what or how I catch it, I just need something now!*

Feathertail carefully waded into the shallow water with her eyes fixed to the current coming around the rockbed. The water swirled around her paws and for a brief moment, the beginning of her nightmare she had flashed before her eyes. She had to shake her head to rid her thoughts, calming her mind. Closing her eyes, Feathertail took in a deep breath before she opened them again. She let the sound of the rushing water soothe her rising anxiety as she got into place: standing just outside of the fast current, she extended an open paw with unsheathed claws and waited. As the river continued to pass by, thoughts began to form in Feathertails' head. Wondering about Icepaw and Ashfoot, if they were doing okay, if they were back to the tree yet, or if they were worrying about her, crossed her mind. Feathertail then imagined Crowfeather guarding the entrance to the Arena, then Crowfeather silently watching over the Arena from Poison's post. His aloof blue gaze watching her from above, his blue gaze looking into hers, his blue gaze passing by her in the clearing only yesterday. *Was that pity in his eyes?* She wondered. Feathertail had been too distracted to see the chub wisp by her claws. Frustration welled up inside of her. *Crowfeather doesn't care about me, stop thinking about him!*

So, she tried again. This time she pushed Crowfeather's blue gaze away when they popped up into her mind. Instead she found herself

wondering about Stormfur. His strong demeanour stood over Feathertail in a vast field, his amber eyes dark and somber. Quickly the image of her long lost brother vanished as she spotted a carp coming straight for her still paw. In a motion as fast as the current it rode along, Feathertail's paw snatched the carp up and out of the water and into her mouth for the killing bite. Pride flowed in her chest, and her mouth immediately watered. She realized she hadn't eaten since the previous morning, and Feathertail had done a lot of running since then. As she padded over to some shade near the riverbank, she also started to notice how shaky her legs were.

Feathertail could hardly contain herself as she dug into the sweet meat of the carp. Barely chewing, she devoured the fish in a matter of heartbeats. She was just licking her lips when she spotted a trembling bush above the opposite bank a few tail-lengths upriver. Feathertail froze and unsheathed her claws.

Between the trunk of a young beech tree and the trembling fern bush, Feathertail spotted white fur. Her heart was in her throat as the bloody figure of Cloudtail came into view. At the sight of an enemy, he froze as well. Neither one moved. Feathertail could see his desperation; Cloudtail's gaze flitted toward the water below and to the carp at her paws and then back to her multiple times. One of his eyes was swollen almost completely shut and even from down on the rockbed she could see his bloodstained neck and shoulders. Feathertail's muscles loosened up, she knew he would not lunge first and she was not about to fight him. *Any cat who attacks another who is injured like him is pathetic.*

Slowly, Feathertail raised to her paws. The movement, though subtle, was enough to make Cloudtail jolt but when Feathertail pointed her muzzle toward the two stepping stones and his eyes quickly followed, he relaxed a bit. She calmly trudged up the slope and left Cloudtail to the scraps if he wanted them, and hurried downriver.

"I'm no monster," She murmured to herself, "He can have the scraps, I will find more prey downriver."

Feathertail had only been following the river downstream for a few fox-lengths when the wind brought a scent that caused her to freeze

once again. She strained her hearing to pick up on anything around her but with the constant noise from the river, Feathertail could not hear anything else. The fur along her spine started to spike up as she felt eyes burning into her. Within only mere heartbeats, a yowl came from behind her and a flash of brown tabby fur flew over the undergrowth toward her. Feathertail dove to the right just as Hawkpaw landed where she had been standing. The thought of running crossed her mind but just as fast, she decided to fight.

Hawkpaw stood with his claws unsheathed and a wide, crazed grin spread across his face. The toothed collar was wrapped around his neck, protecting him from any deadly blows. Feathertail took a weary step back, eyes narrowed to a slit and the blood roaring in her ears as her heart raced. She let out a low growl and in turn Hawkpaw let out a hiss.

"Where's your precious friends?" He sneered, "You know you can't protect her. Once you're dead, I'll make sure to give her a one way ticket to the dark forest where you will wander until the end of time!" As the words came out of his mouth, it was like he was spitting them at Feathertail's paws near the end of his vicious statement.

Rage pulsed through her veins but before she could even respond, Hawkpaw lunged forward with his unsheathed paws extended out straight in front of him. Feathertail slid to the side and swiped at his face as he landed beside her. Raking her claws across his right eye, Hawkpaw let out a screech. Instantly blood began leaking from his face and his eye swelled shut. *That's for hurting Cloudtail!* She thought with triumph, but the feeling quickly dispersed as he lashed out at her. Hawkpaw's claws just missed her face as she turned away but it met her shoulder instead. In the same instant, Feathertail threw her other paw across his side. Blood immediately began pouring from both wounds but Hawkpaw didn't let it faze him while it took Feathertail aback.

Hawkpaw dove for Feathertail again, but this time she didn't have enough time to move out of his way. He barrelled into the she-cat, his collar piercing into her ribs just under the gash he gave her shoulder. The two tumbled down the bank, both pummelling at the others' stomach, and into the fast current below.

The cold water encompassed the silver tabby, a shock from the heat of the day, and she felt Hawkpaw's claws stop hitting her. Blood polluted the water around them. Her injuries stung as the water pushed and pulled at Feathertail's body. She had no idea which way was up or down as the river disoriented her, sending her farther and farther downstream. As she tried to get a grip on the current, Feathertail spotted Hawkpaw trying to swim as well but just as fast as she noticed his brown tabby pelt, Feathertail watched him hit a rock and stop moving. She rolled past the rock in less than a heartbeat. Briefly she wondered if he was dead or just knocked out, but her lungs begging for air consumed her mind.

Clawing at the water, she could see trees and the glint of sunlight through the surface. Just as Feathertail was beginning to black out, she broke through the water and gasped for air. Noticing the riverbank was lower downstream, Feathertail splashed desperately toward the edge until she could get a grip on the pebbles. Though she was now out of the water and panting, she still felt her vision darkening. She could feel the anxiety rising but Feathertail felt too tired to care. Collapsing onto her good side, she watched the treetops wave in the breeze and listened to her heart rate slow and the water rush by. Feathertail felt herself begin to shiver even though she laid in sunlight and the blood from her cut was warming the fur it leaked into. Even the shivering was causing more pain to her injuries but she couldn't help it. *I can't stay here...* Feathertail looked with only her eyes. It would take a lot of effort to just get up the bank, let alone to find Ashfoot and Icepaw, with the blood loss she was enduring. She gazed downriver some more and noticed the sides of the river were all large rocks instead of hanging vegetation. *There might be a cave I can shelter in before someone finishes me off... If I could just get there...* Feathertail almost attempted to get up, but her body was too exhausted. She willed herself to crawl, but instead she laid there. *I'll just have a short nap, get my strength back... and then I will be back at the tree for sunhigh...*

The last thoughts in her head were Icepaw and Ashfoot padding toward the gnarled oak tree, as if heading away from Feathertail, before her vision went black.

***

Feathertail blinked open her eyes to find she was inside a dark cave. The smell of herbs and damp rock filled her nose. She tried to move but immediately her body screamed in denial. Letting out a groan, Feathertail could feel the sting of her injuries just from the bit of moving she had made.

Her weak gaze followed to the mouth of the cave as movement outside in the darkness caught Feathertail's eye. There was a white cat padding toward her with a bundle of herbs in her jaws, but her eyesight was too blurry to see who it could be. "Icepaw?" Feathertail croaked before passing back out again.

_____

Another finished chapter and it didn't take a year?? Craaaazy. Hope the few who have noticed enjoy x Ive been enjoying rewriting. XOXO

_____

After scrambling up the thick tree trunk, I sat and waited for even the slightest bit of movement, eyes wide and ears pricked for any noise. I scanned the forest below me; at this height, I felt that I could see almost the whole arena.

It was actually beautiful, if it weren't for the deafening silence that rung in your ears when you waited to be preyed on. Or the screeches that fill your ears until you cry out, or how you can almost taste the victims blood, even when their farther away than our *real* home.

I shook my head, *I need to stop thinking like that... I need to be confident that I will win this with Frostfur, Loudbelly and Icepaw. I will find a way to escape with my three allies and we can win this together.*

Again, I shook my head. *Focus!* I crouched down on the branch and narrowed my eyes to slits, searching the forests floor again for any movement.

A loud screech from the left of me rung in my ears and my heart pounded. I sniffed the air for enemy cats but I knew it wasn't cats

that were attacking as soon as I got the strong whiff of it. A shiver went down my back as I realized it was a fox. Unable to make out whether it was a tom or she-cat, panic welled up inside of me. *Loudbelly!* The realization that Loudbelly could be the one being attacked hit me like a stone wall. *We need him in this as much as he needs us...* The four of us together create a perfect weapon of the four things we needed most, and without his skills at shelter, and assuming medicine, we would be dead.

I jumped down and threw my head into the tree trunk where the den was, "I will be right back, I have to find Loudbelly!" I exclaimed, dashing away toward the direction the screams came from. The cat let out another howl of pain. This time I could tell it was a tom's voice, but I still had no idea if it was Loudbelly's voice or not.

Jumping over logs that were higher than me, dodging under thick branches, and avoiding roots sticking up out of the ground, I rushed toward the horrible stench of fox. The voice had stopped but the smell of blood was still coating my tongue. "Please don't be Loudbelly, please..." I begged through gasps.

I spotted the red fur of the fox and caught a glimpse of the cat. Two more had joined the attacked cat, beating the fox senseless. The fox let out barks like a dog as the other two confused it. I slowed to a halt when neared the fight and started backing away. *They are* not *Loudbelly...* Which was a good thing, but also a bad thing. It was Mudclaw, Hawkpaw and Sandstorm. I couldn't get near them or they'd tear me to shreds within heartbeats. *I would be one less cat to worry about...*

Quietly, I backed away as the fox took off running, blood trailing behind it. The three of them sniffed the air and turned to the bushes that hid me. *Oh no...* I gulped as Hawkpaw let out a growl. "Look who it is." The tom sneered, stepping closer with Mudclaw and Sandstorm beside him.

I never thought of Sandstorm as a killer, but I knew she was mean when she was grumpy. "It's little miss Feathertail, and she's standing in our way of victory." Hawkpaw snarled, lip curled and fur spiked up. Blood was splattered all over the three cats' faces and bodies,

but they didn't seem to care.

Without seeing it coming, Hawkpaw lunged at me, landing on my back and biting onto my spine. I yelped in pain and started bucking him, feeling his nose hitting my back harshly. But, still he did not let go. His claws dug into my skin in an attempt to stay put.

I hissed in frustration and rolled onto my back with all my strength, hearing a muffled yowl in pain. He was in an odd position but that wasn't going to stop me. Hawkpaw let go and I stood up, pinning him down and slashing at his face and neck. Mudclaw dove for me, arms extended and teeth bared. I dodged away, rolling on the ground until I found the ground on my paws. I landed just beside Hawkpaw - he had rolled a bit away, leaving a small puddle of blood - and he came flying at me again.

I dodged to the right a bit and I rammed into his side with my shoulder. He slammed into the nearest tree and let out a groan. Hawkpaw sat there for a few moments, panting. I took the opportunity to dash away, out of sight. Taking a heartbeat to look over my shoulder, I saw Sandstorm nudging them up to their feet. I slowed down a bit, taking in large gasps of air.

By the time they were up and ready to come at me, I'd be gone. Out of sight. The thing I was worried about was, *Where's Loudbelly? Did he make it back?*

I halted as a loud voice from above the trees echoed into the arena. I tripped over a root and yelped, landing face first into the pines and leaves. "Deaths of yesterday:" It announced; it was Poison. "Haypaw and Webfoot." I let out a loud sigh of relief when he didn't say Loudbelly, or Icepaw and Frostfur for that matter. Shaking out my pelt, relieving my face of a few pine nettles, I headed over to the the tree where Frostfur was waiting. She sighed in relief as I halted in front of her.

"How's Icepaw?" I asked and she flicked her tail to the den. I peered in slightly and saw she was sleeping peacefully. I backed away and I looked back over at Frostfur. She looked me over, concern filling her gaze. There were only a few scratches, nothing serious or worth wasting time finding goldenrod.

Her frail body was fluffed up and shaky. "Any sign of Loudbelly?" She rasped. *She needs to eat and rest more.* I shook my head and sighed, "Nope. The scream came from Hawkpaw and his group." She nodded but didn't say anything.

"You need to rest. After Loudbelly comes back, I will go hunt for us, that is if he didn't get any prey." She shook her head and watched the forest through stern eyes, "I'm fine."

We sat in silence for several heartbeats, just waiting. Finally, my ear pricked at a slight sound behind me. "Loudbelly?" I meowed, turning around. Before I could move, two huge dogs came hurtling for me, jaws wide and slobber flying.

"Run Frostfur!" I yowled, clawing at the first ones face. In the corner of my eye, Frostfur ducked into the den while I dodged the dogs' bites. Hit by hit, I tore at the dogs' faces. I side-stepped as one snapped at me, its yellow teeth dangerously close to my nose. Ducking under the dog, I slashed it's stomach as it ran forward. The other grabbed my scruff and shook me in the air like I was its toy.

My sight was a blur as the world spun around me. I could feel my brain shaking in my head, causing a terrible headache to form. I yowled in pain as its teeth tore into my skin, and suddenly my scruff was ripped from its mouth. The fur on the back of my neck was ripped out and I could feel blood beading up. Within heartbeats, I collided with a tree trunk head first. I tried to stand but my body refused.

And before I knew it, I was blacked out cold.

*****

I woke up in a dark place. Fear made my stomach churn, *Where am I?* My neck still felt sore and my body was as stiff as a rock. I hardly remembered a thing, only that the dogs had attacked me.

Did they attack Frostfur and Icepaw? I wondered, my breathing quickening. I tried to stand up but my legs buckled beneath the weight, so I made myself sit down.

Did Loudbelly come back? Is he okay? Am I dead? Why is it so dark? Questions clouded my mind to the point where I had to shake my head to stop them from coming. I needed to focus on getting up. I didn't *feel* dead, I could feel the ground and I wasn't coated in starlight like those nursery-tails had said. Plus, I could feel the pain the dogs had caused me, which most likely meant I was alive.

I slowly stood up and padded out of the dark place. Soon I realized it was the hole in under the tree as I poked my head out into the cool night air. Icepaw was laying on the ground with Frostfur. They both turned as my paws hit the grassy ground. "Feathertail, we thought you'd never wake up!" Icepaw mewed, standing up to greet me. She touched noses with me, her wide eyes swarming with relief.

"How long have I been asleep? Did Loudbelly come back? Anymore deaths? Are the dogs dead?" I asked, questions flying out of my mouth like a cat abusing catmint.

"You were asleep for two sunrises, yes he's on guard, Cedarheart and Sandstorm died during those two days, and yes, we fought them off." Frostfur answered when I stopped rambling questions. I was surprised she even remembered each of the questions.

Nodding to her, I hurried to find the old brown tom. "Loudbelly!" I called and he jumped down behind me. He smirked and flicked my ear with his tail. "Ah, Feathertail, I thought you were going to be asleep forever." He teased, though his eyes were hiding worry. He continued, purring, "Are you hungry? I managed to get a magpie and two mice."

I shook my head, "Did you guys eat?" Icepaw shook her head as well, looking to Frostfur. "To be asleep for two nights with no fresh-kill? You can't tell me you're not hungry." Loudbelly narrowed his eyes at me.

"Loudbelly had gotten back yesterday with the prey, and we ate the two mice together. We saved the magpie for you." Frostfur mewed. I flicked my tail and raised my chin, "You two need to eat, I will go out for more. I don't think it's fair for me to eat something someone else worked for." I decided, stalking away quickly before they could

stop me.

"You aren't fully healed, Feathertail, come back!" Loudbelly hissed, but I knew he wouldn't come after me. Frostfur was old and frail and Icepaw was young and vulnerable, together they didn't make that great of a team so Loudbelly needed to stay with them. And I knew he knew that, too.

I shook out my fur and parted my jaws to search for prey. It was chilly and it felt like rain was coming. I looked up but the sky was hidden by trees, tons and tons of leaf-full trees. A stick snapped suddenly, and instantly I ducked down into a crouching position.

Eyes wide and fur bristled up, I glanced around the dark forest. I stayed down and looked carefully through the wilderness. My heart slowly went back to its normal pace as moments went by without anyone lunging for me.

I forced myself to believe that it was a mouse or rabbit, but something was telling me it was something different. Taking a deep breath, I straightened my posture and began to walk in search of prey. I sniffed the air and followed the scent of a dove. Stalking toward the strong scent, my mouth began to water. Behind a bush of bracken was two doves pecking away at seeds.

Creeping carefully forward, I got so close I could reach out with my front paw and touch them. Wriggling my haunches and holding my breath, I leaped. A loud sound above me made me jump out of my fur while the doves scattered away. Their panicked coo's echoed in the sky.

I growled with fury as I landed right where they were. I fought to keep myself from yowling into the trees and hunting down the one who made me lose perfectly good prey. I refused to let the cat - or whatever it was - know I cared, and kept going. I felt eyes staring into my pelt but I decided not to turn around. Whoever was staring at me wanted attention, and I wasn't about to give it to them.

I stalked away and spotted a mouse doing almost nothing. I quickly got into a crouch and leaped, but the stranger made a similar noise and scared it off just before I could get to it. A scream was rising in

my throat but I refused to let it out. Stomping away, I soon spotted a small rabbit. I charged full tilt and leaped at it. Alarming the rabbit, the brown creature scurried away. I dashed at it, running around rocks and branches until finally, I pounced and pinned it down.

Giving it the killing bite, pride warmed me up. *Finally!* I grabbed it by the neck and started my way back, panting heavily. I looked around. *Where am I?* I wondered, suddenly feeling helpless and lost.

My heart pounded as I searched the forest. I ran toward the place where I had tried to catch the mouse but I couldn't find the place where the two doves were. Starting to panic, I spun around, feeling dizzy and alone. *If I don't find my way to the tree, I'll be killed!*

I ran in the first direction that seemed in anyway familiar and in a blink of an eye, I was rolling head first. My spine burst with pain as I tumbled into a tree. My paw throbbed where I had tripped and fallen, but I ignored it as I studied the tree. I wanted to scream with joy; it was the den!

Loudbelly came out of the hole and purred, looking down at me from where I lay, "Well, well, well. Did you bring the rabbit or did the rabbit bring you?" He teased. I rolled my eyes, purring.
I stood up and set the rabbit down. "I would've been back sooner with two doves and a mouse but someone was in the trees scaring them away..." I muttered as Loudbelly took the rabbit and brought it into the den.

The brown tom didn't seem to concerned, but I couldn't help but feel that the cat now knew where we slept. "Odd... At least you got a rabbit. This thing might just feed all of us."

I jumped as a yowl from far away echoed through the treetops. My fur spiked up as I glanced around the forest hurriedly, expecting a herd to come at us.

"It's probably Hawkpaw and Mudclaw attacking someone. It's okay." Frostfur yawned from inside of the den. I nodded but I couldn't get myself to relax. I still felt like someone was watching me.

Frostfur's stern meow from the den brought me from my thoughts. "Eat Feathertail, you haven't in two days." Frostfur ordered, her voice serious. I ducked into the den and dipped my head, finally devouring that fresh-kill I longed to eat.

Chapter 5 - Death Match

Howls were haunting us as we curled up in the tree. They wouldn't stop. They didn't seem that far away, which worried us even more. Tension and anxiousness wafted from each one of us in the tree trunk as we listened to their bellows. Every once in a while it would stop, but not for long.

The stench of dog was loomed around every corner. It seeped into the tree and stunk the den, even over the strong sap smell. It was terrible. I felt like my allies were dogs and I was in the middle of them.

While everyone tried to sleep, I stood up quietly and padded out into the cool night air. The trees' branches blew softly in the wind and the grass swayed peacefully. With the wind howling, it carried the dogs cries closer to me. It felt like they were behind a tree, waiting for me to creep closer and closer until they could attack efficiently. I wasn't sure where they were, but I was determined to find them. Maybe to shut them up... for good.

I padded around the tree trunk but there was no sign of the dogs. Parting my jaws to track their smell, I couldn't find even a trace of dog. I trekked forward, glancing left and then right, trying to find any trail of their scent. Suddenly, the dogs stopped howling. As I waited, frozen, for more than a few heartbeats, I realized they weren't going to start again. The only sound was the wind as it picked up. A shiver rippled down my spine. *Silence usually isn't a good thing...* I told myself, backing away.

Piercing yellow eyes glowed in the bushes and a deep growl echoed from the darkness. Heart pounding like a bird caught in a trap, I dashed back to the den and waited at the entrance silently. The fur on my shoulders stood on end. The suspense and curiosity coursed through my mind, causing me to tremble. *Should I have loured them away? Will they follow my trail and attack us all? Would they even be able to get into the den?*

None of us were in shape to fight dogs. Especially a whole pack of them. We were all exhausted and in need of prey.

"Loudbelly, wake up." I ordered in a whisper voice. As I spoke, my eyes were locked on the darkness outside. Almost instantly he was beside me. "What is it?" He muttered, his voice sloshed. "Wolves. Our best bet is to leave," I replied, still keeping my voice low enough to not wake the others.

"Why leave? That's too risky. Besides, a big wolf wouldn't be able to get into this small den." Loudbelly meowed softly, blinking over at me reassuringly. "Got a better idea? We're too tired risk a fight right now." I growled, rousing Icepaw and Frostfur with a nudge.

Loudbelly shook his head and rolled his eyes. "Are you mad? It's still dark. We should at least wait until morning. The creatures that none of us can fight, even together, are roaming right now!" Anxiety poked at my stomach. *I can't risk it... It would be my fault if they attacked us!*

Icepaw looked around the dim den with half-closed eyes. "W-what's going on?" She mumbled, rubbing an eye with her paw. "We can't risk it. I'm sure there is at least a tree we can find to sleep in if we don't find another den right away." I nudged the small apprentice to her paws.

Frostfur didn't look like she quite agreed, but as the wolves let out a deep howl, she stood up too. The two white cats nodded sleepily and Loudbelly turned back to me. "This is extremely dangerous. Keep your ears sharp and eyes peeled for Hawkpaw, Mudclaw and the rest of their gang. They'll be out for sure."

Nodding, I led the way through the darkness, keeping my body low and tail tucked into my side. We made our way past the scent of wolves and stalked quickly through the forest. My eyes were wide, trying to focus through the thickness of the dark.

I stumbled on a root of a tree and instantly my foot started throbbing. I didn't even hit it that hard. Pushing through the shots of pain, I looked through the dark for a place we could stay. I heard leaves rustling and I halted. The three almost bumped into each

other at the abrupt stop.

They looked at me in confusion. I pricked my ears but the rustling had stopped. Gaining confidence that it was just my imagination, I pushed on, gaining speed without knowing it.

Leaves began to rustle around the four of us again. Stopping, I looked to where it was coming from and spotted a bush moving gently. The wind blew the grass around it slowly so I assumed it was the wind moving that, too.

I picked up my pace. *There had to be something near by we can rest in.* The sound came again and I halted quietly, the three allies bumping into me. *Someone has to be following us!*

The sound continued and I caught sight of a cats tail. I crouched down and pounced on the white tail. The cat hissed at me in surprise, fur standing up along it's spine and teeth bared in fury. Its teeth glistened in the moonlight.

I hissed back, unsheathing my claws and letting out a deep growl. Another cat stepped out. Then two more stepped out. It was Mudclaw, Hawkpaw, Ashfoot, and Cloudtail.

We're dead!

Loudbelly stood beside me and Icepaw and Frostfur as well. Each of them unsheathed their claws and prepared for a battle.

"This will be as easy as stealing prey from a kit!" Hawkpaw retorted, leaping at Icepaw. She was already ready. *Just what we needed. A fight.*

I lunged at Cloudtail, who dodged it with a blank face. I landed beside him and rolled away from his blow. He bared snarled at me and slapped his paw down, trying to slash me. *Has he gone insane?* I swerved to right and then to the left, confusing the crazy tom. I watched him, fur rising and leaped at him. This time, he wasn't ready.

Pouncing onto the toms back, I gave him several blows to the neck and head. A yelp came from Frostfur and I looked up quickly to see

her cornered in a tree by Mudclaw. I focused again on Cloudtail - who was trying to buck me off. I sliced his spine and immediately blood welled up. I cut his ears several times before he flipped to his side, crushing my left front and hind leg.

I growled in frustration, hitting him with fierce blows to the face while he tried to get up. Cloudtail stood up and jumped at me. Pinning me down, I tried to get my breath back. I clawed at his stomach while he slashed at mine. I used my right paw to smack his face and while his face was looking to the left, I bit his leg and tossed him off of me. My jaw throbbed a bit after that, but it was better than having to suffer anymore blows to my bleeding stomach.

I could feel the blood as it trickled out of the wounds in my stomach and down further until it dripped off. I took a step forward and winced. I longed to sleep right now, to let myself heal.
I just wanted there to be peace for once.

Reluctantly, I toughened up and charged myself at Cloudtail just as he was coming for me. He backed away but I rammed into him. He yelped as I tripped him. He fell onto his side and I took my claw and sunk it deep into his side. I felt my claws scrape his rips. I never noticed how skinny he was; not that I cared, but who would with his long fluffy coat of cotton?

Cloudtail hissed and got up again, slashing at me. I stumbled back from the hit but I made sure I returned it. He and I clawed back and forth. Blood splattered here and there as we tore into each others skin.

"Lets go before The Horror comes! Run!" Ashfoot snapped and just like that, the four of them took off. I stood there, breathing heavily. My stomach burned and my face and neck stung from recent hits. I was confused and in pain. *Whats 'The Horror'?* I wondered, looking to Loudbelly who was sitting down.

I looked to the other side to ask Frostfur or maybe even Icepaw and was horrified to see Frostfur laying limp at the roots of the birch tree. I rushed over to her, ignoring the pain in my stomach.

Blood was splattered on the tree trunk and more dripped from her open mouth. Her eyes were still open; her usual color was coated with white. "Frostfur!" I gasped, nudging her ribs. She didn't so much as flinch. The white she-cat was stiff.

Her knotted white fur was more matted and very, very bloody. Her neck had a clean cut through the middle, blood still seeping out. It had stopped flowing from the wound... There were claw marks marking almost every part of her body, and each one was deep enough to fit each of my claws in.

"Oh, Frostfur..." I whispered weakly, looking to my paws. *It was all my fault. I shouldn't have led them out of the den... We would all be sleeping right now if I hadn't of gone out to see where the wolves were! I should've helped her. She did so much for me before - giving me prey before we were chosen when I had none to eat - and I didn't even* try *to help her. I'm unbelievably selfish, I could've saved her...*

"This is my fault. Why didn't I try to help her; she was one of us!" I wailed, not meaning to say it aloud. Loudbelly didn't seem to be as shocked and concerned, though. "Its alright, Feathertail. She was frail. Its either this or suffering something much worse, like starvation. You were trying to defeat Cloudtail, it was her time to die."

I didn't reply to what he said, instead changing the subject to take my mind off of her. I turned away. "What is this... *Horror*?" I asked and Loudbelly shrugged. Blood gushed from a wound on his shoulder, but his hard stare showed no signs of pain.

"That I'm not sure of. But one thing I'm sure we need to do, is run and find shelter. Poison takes bodies and buries them. The wolves, foxes, and badgers that live here don't eat us, they just kill us. Don't worry. I was around when they took Sandstorm's body." Loudbelly meowed, turning to me and then to Icepaw.

Icepaw's left eye was swollen and she limped over, a toe bleeding. When my eyes widened, she meowed softly, "I lost a claw... At least it's stuck in Hawkpaw's face now!" I touched noses with her, "We will clean ourselves up in the morning and find herbs to help the wounds heal."

I nodded to Loudbelly and turned to look at Frostfur again. I smoothed her fur, closed her eyes, and lay her on her side so she wasn't in a position that made her look like she couldn't fight. *I'm so sorry, Frostfur. Please forgive me.*

"Alright," I meowed, turning around and leading the way to no where in particular. "Lets get going before The Horror comes."

Chapter 6 - The Horror

Loudbelly carried Icepaw as we trotted toward east so we could avoid another clash with those three mouse-brains being ruled by Hawkpaw. He was supposed to be a warrior by now, but an injury made him have double time with training. Hawkpaw was actually going to have his warrior ceremony after The Reaping.

I found it easier to be in the dense forest, now that I was used to it. It almost made me feel safer with trees surrounding me, keeping me semi-hidden. Making my way forward, I glanced over at Loudbelly. The brown tom seemed tired and worried, while Icepaw laid on his back bleeding heavily. With her eyes closed, she seemed to be unconscious. The only way I knew she wasn't dead was because her chest rose and fell slowly.

Looking forward again, I continued to pad through the trees. "We need some goldenrod and cobweb. Goldenrod is everywhere and if we find a cave, we will have cobwebs and shelter." I nodded and kept going without replying to the tom. The forest came to an end and we were near the edge of the hole everyone called the Arena.

The edge of the Arena was so steep there was no way you would be able to climb up. Even if we were to try, the guard at the top was watching us like a hawk. I looked forward again and kept going, following the edge. My ears perked up all of a sudden when I picked up on the sound of a waterfall. "Loudbelly!" I whispered, turning to him. He looked at me with hope, turning his head sharply to see me.

"I can hear a waterfall! Water means fish!" I smiled and we dashed forward. I had to slow down and wait for Loudbelly because with Icepaw on his back, he didn't want to run too fast or she'd fall. She could loose more blood that way, too.

I sniffed around and found a flower that had a strong scent to it. "Goldenrod!" Loudbelly gasped and set Icepaw down gently. He picked it and set it beside Icepaw. "There isn't a lot but it might just

do. Feathertail, grab cobweb in the bushes and trees, please." He meowed, nudging Icepaw awake. As I left, he began to chew it up. I could hear him murmur to the apprentice as I padded away, "Lick your wounds, Icepaw. It'll clean them."

Running to the waterfall, I searched around for any white bunches of webs. I looked in the trees' branches, grass, and finally I found some in between the rocks beside the waterfall. Grabbing a stick, I collected a wad of it on the tip. I turned tail and ran back to where Loudbelly was waiting.

"Here," I panted, passing him the stick. He dipped his head and I looked around. A blood curdling scream came from somewhere past the river and my heart leaped in shock. I turned to Loudbelly but even as scared as he seemed, he kept working on Icepaw. Applying pressure, he stopped the bleeding and then applied the chewed flower.

I stood in front of him, claws unsheathed. I listened as the screech echoed across the river again. I flinched and turned toward the water and heard a loud splash. Loudbelly stood beside me, "I know its scary, but everything will be alright." The brown tom worked quickly as the loud thumps of large paws came closer. My heart lurched as the mysterious creature came into sight. I gasped. The Horror had to be three times as big as me and Loudbelly. His eyes were bright orange, burning like a fire.

"I think I've lost my mind." I whimpered as The Horror charged after me. Loudbelly slabbed on the rest of the poultice and lifted the apprentice onto his back again. Taking off, the white she-cat bounced as he ran. I followed him on his heels.

"We're going no where!" I yelled at him and he looked over his shoulder.

"It doesn't matter! Hurry up, Feathertail!"

A deep growl came from behind us,"You can run but you'll never escape!" It gave me motivation to run even faster. I could feel its heavy paws thundering closer, shaking the tree branches and the ground underneath us.

"He can speak?!" Loudbelly gasped, eyes wide, "I guess so!" I yowled, turning to the left, "Follow me!"

"I'll try," Loudbelly shouted and I ran as fast as I could. I glimpsed over my shoulder and saw Loudbelly struggling to catch up. I stopped and grabbed Icepaw, throwing her over my shoulder and running after Loudbelly. The older tom was panting heavily.

"This is insane!" Loudbelly shouted over his shoulder. "Tell me about it!" I rushed to get to him as The Horror pounded closer. "Go, go, go!" I yowled at him and he turned into the forest again. I was going to miss that river. *We didn't even get a chance to fish!*

I turned to the west and we came to the darker forest. I looked over my shoulder and watched Loudbelly begin to lose his speed while The Horror closed in. I dropped Icepaw and grabbed her by the scruff to climb a thick tree.

I reached the nearest branch and set Icepaw beside me, letting her lean on the trunk. I waited with my heard whirling for Loudbelly to climb up the tree too, but after a few slow, agonizing moments, he never came. I began to panic. *I can't heal Icepaw, he's the one who knows the herbs! Come on Loudbelly ,hurry up!*

Glancing at the sleeping apprentice, I hesitated, but reluctantly jumped down. I heard growls come form ahead and I stalked toward it, trembling. The sound of ripping flesh answered my anxious question. "Loudbelly..." I whispered, stalking in behind a bush and peeking over. Loudbelly's brown fur was scattered everywhere, blood soaked into the grass around it. The Horror was ripping Loudbelly apart.

I swallowed a scream as I stared in horror at the sight in front of me. *I'm too late. This is all my fault. I should've stayed with him. I didn't even try to stay with him. I knew he was old. I knew he was going to slow down easily.* I thought, blaming myself. I knew it was my fault. Closing my eyes, I fought the urge to let out a whimper.

The Horror was chewing on Loudbelly's flesh. "Why didn't you scream for help, Loudbelly?" I whispered, barely audible. I couldn't look anymore. I was going to heave up whatever was left in my

stomach.

I backed away - there was nothing I could do - and headed quickly to the tree with Icepaw in it. Sorrow pained my heart, leaving a lump in my throat. Climbing up, I used my front paws to hold onto the thick branch while I slowly made my way to the other side of Icepaw as she slept. I lifted myself up until I could get my hind legs over the branch, careful not to swing the branch.

I laid down on the branch, facing Icepaw, and wrapped my hind legs around the branch as best as I could. Closing my eyes, I forced the sound of other animals chowing down on the flesh of Loudbelly and possibly Frostfur out of my head. That night, nightmares flooded my brain, screams and bloody friends begging for my help appearing.

Chapter 7 - Stories of the Past

The morning call came above and jolted me awake. My heart lurched in fright as I slid off the branch. I held on for dear life with my claws, upside down. I didn't want to wake up Icepaw until she was ready, so I swallowed a scream for her to help me. Pulling myself up again, I glanced to the sky as Poison's voice echoed through the Arena.

"The deaths of last night: Loudbelly, Frostfur." Icepaw blinked awake as Poison's voice rung throughout the arena. "What... What happened?" Icepaw looked around and then set her panicked gaze on me. "Feathertail?" She woke up at the wrong time.

"Oh, um, morning Icepaw." I breathed, tearing at the soft wood with my claws. She blinked at me with confused.

I glanced to the ground and after judging the height, I let myself fall. Landing swiftly, I called up to the white apprentice who peered over the branch. "Are you okay, Feathertail?" Icepaw called down to me and I nodded, looking up at her.

"Come down, we need to find shelter and fresh-kill before night-fall," I insisted and she climbed down slowly and cautiously. I looked away, searching for any sign of The Horror, but the sound of claws scraping the bark drowned everything else out.

Not realizing she had come to sit beside me, I imagined leaving the horrid Arena, the dead behind me, never to be heard about again. I pictured me being free, the feeling of the wind in my fur and the one I love beside me. But Crowfeather was brainwashed. He no longer loved me, or even knew what love was. Besides, I couldn't just *leave* everything behind with no memory. It's almost impossible to be free after killing so many cats. As for Crowfeather, he would be searched for until he was found if he ran away.

I had heard rumors that the last winner of the Hunger Games, Thornclaw, had gone crazy and was out for murder. *That* also made

me feel a bit off just *thinking* about it.

"Psst, Feathertail," Icepaw's hiss made me turn to her, shaking me from my thoughts. "Yes?" I answered, blinking over at her.

"I asked where we were going to go like three times!" She snapped, her ear twitching.

"Oh, sorry." I murmured, turning away again.

"Yeah."

"Mm-hmm,"

"So... Where are we going?" She put her face in front of mine, gazing deep into my eyes.

"Oh! Sorry," I mewed, looking to her and then the tree. *We shouldn't stay so close to Loudbelly's* accident. *Icepaw couldn't bare that.*

Quickly, I decided where we would go. "Lets head this way and find a new tree. Hawkpaw won't find us if we stay in a tree, up higher this time." Icepaw nodded, padding in beside me as I headed off.

We fell silent as we picked up our pace, heading away from the river Loudbelly and I had discovered. Icepaw limped slightly with her wounds still fresh. I noticed they were healing well, though. The wind was heavier that day, whizzing by in a rush. It smelled of rain and when I glanced up at the sky, I noticed the clouds were dark. The ground was spiky with pine needles, poking my pads constantly.

"So, Loudbelly's gone?" Icepaw croaked, keeping her eyes on her paws, "I remember what happened to Frostfur, but not Loudbelly..." Icepaw's small mew was barely audible and I pricked my ears toward her to hear her more carefully.

I hesitated and closed my eyes for a brief heartbeat, unsure of how I would tell the young she-cat. I thought of how I was going to word this. *Should I just say it straight up or be gentle about it?*

"Look, Icepaw, while you slept and healed, Loudbelly failed to keep

up with me. He was old, weak and not the best runner after carrying you." I began, my voice braking slightly. *This is all my fault.* Icepaw looked at me with big, sorrowful eyes. "He was eaten by The Horror. He is safe now, don't worry about him," I stopped, looking to my paws. I studied the ground as the number of old, dead leaves and pine needles increased when we traveled under the trees. Icepaw was still silent.

I looked at her in the corner of my eye. She was looking at her paws as well, shoulders hunched and ears drooping. She was technically dragging herself along with me.

"Don't feel bad, Icepaw, it wasn't your fault. It was mine, I didn't wait for him..." I murmured and she slowly turned to me, stopping.

"It isn't anyone's fault," Icepaw croaked. Talking seemed like an effort. "Don't take it out on you if I can't take it out on me. In the Hunger Games, anyone is bound to die..." I looked at her, but as much as I wanted to agree or say anything positive about the situation, all that came to mind was negative.

Pausing, I attempted the lump of guilt that sat in my throat. "I'm not sure StarClan exists anymore. Through all of our troubles, they didn't send anyone in BloodClan a message. Either they don't trust anyone anymore, or they gave up on us just as much as we have on them," I murmured, padding away. I picked up speed, almost running through the pine-forest.

I could hear the calls above of the birds. *I wonder what Poison thinks of all this. Does he want more fighting? More deaths? Is he satisfied by how Loudbelly died? Will he ever be satisfied?*

The sound of Icepaw calling for me, her paws thumping as loud as my heart as they fought to catch up with me, made me glance over my shoulder. *I can't leave her.* I stopped and waited for her to approach me. I watched as her stained white fur blow in the wind and as she ran gracefully. Her tiny frame looked worn and unclean.

It's a shame... An innocent cat like her shouldn't be in here.

"Feathertail, I never expected a strong-willed cat like you to give up

so easily! StarClan may not trust anyone, but I believe they are trying their best to do what is right." Icepaw breathed and I looked forward, trotting in the direction I was going before. "I still believe. I saw them. They're real," She whispered.

I shrugged, not responding.

Icepaw didn't push my beliefs and came to trot beside me. Together we searched for a tall, thick branched tree. One Hawkpaw wouldn't come up... hopefully.

We had found a good enough tree to perch in and only could find a pigeon from the tree. It seemed plump enough to fill us until the shock wore off.

The wind stirred the leaves below, the branches, and our fur as well. It was wild that day. The main reason that we took forever to get the pigeon was because all the other prey we had found and attempted to catch kept its ears peeled more often, making it incredibly hard to catch anything. But, we managed to catch the pigeon and that was enough to be thankful. The bird was almost fat enough to satisfy the both of us.

Honestly, I was relieved to know Loudbelly and Frostfur were gone and out of the way. It felt selfish and cruel to think it, but it was true. They were both old and slowing us down, another pair of mouths to feed. Icepaw and I were young enough to run longer than them, hunt and fight quicker and better. They were bound to die some how.

I looked up to see Icepaw staring at me. "What?" I mewed quietly, a purr edging my tone.

She sighed and rolled her eyes, "I asked why everything is so dark now. Did you know what it was like to not have dark times?" I looked to the pigeon again narrowed my eyes in thought.

"When I was born, we had a warrior code that everyone followed, and there were four Clans, not just one. It was a happy life, sharing

tongues and always getting along with one another," I recalled, gazing out beyond the she-cat.

"But," I sighed, "Tigerstar - a ferocious beast, always hungry for battle and blood - had made all half-Clan cats fight to the death. I was one of them, but Stormfur - my littermate - and I didn't, we were too young. Mistyfoot's littermate, Stonefur, had died that night. We escaped and the Clans began to battle again." I looked over at Icepaw and saw hurt flash in her eyes.

When I didn't continue, she gestured with her head for me to keep going. "Go on," She whispered. I had only stopped for a bit and I guess she was pretty eager to know more.

"Leopardstar - my past leader, the leader of RiverClan - united with Tigerstar and became TigerClan. Firestar and Tallstar - ThunderClan and WindClan leaders - united to become LionClan." I explained, taking a bite of pigeon. "They were the two Clans that used to rule the forest, before the four Clans came to be..." Icepaw's tail twitched and she nodded quickly.

"Stormfur, Mistyfoot, and I had been taken into ThunderClan and no one but Tigerstar knew about what had come next. Tigerstar must've known the cat or something, but he brought in a rouge-Clan named BloodClan. The leader was as small as a newly-made apprentice, but his eyes showed no fear, no emotion. His claws were replaced by dog claws, a collar embedded with dog and cat teeth." Icepaw's eyes went as round as two full moons. She swallowed down a piece of pigeon, and I did the same.

"He looked like he could do no harm at all, but when Tigerstar tried to coax him to attack LionClan, he refused. Tigerstar tried to get him to do it, trying to force him by attacking him, but the leader of BloodClan - Scourge his name was - sliced open his stomach as Tigerstar lunged for him. All nine lives were bled out at once. Scourge tried to take over the forest, and that's when Firestar came in." I took a deep breath, ready to say more. There wasn't much left to say, and did it ever feel depressing to know we've lived like this for so long.

I chewed the last bit of what was left of the pigeon and licked my

paw, drawing it over my ear. "What did Firestar do? Did he get killed? Is that when this all started? How long ago was that?" Icepaw sat up, her paws vibrating and mouth open.

"Firestar was supposed to save us, save everyone. But he was filled with kittypet blood. He wasn't a true warrior... Bluestar, his leader at the time, never should've brought him in. She trusted StarClan too much." I groaned, looking around. The wind was attacking the tree terribly. I felt like it was going to rip the branch off and send us flying away.

"Bluestar?" Icepaw mewed, cocking her head to the side. I nodded, "There were many, *many*, leaders and cats before Firestar came along. Anyway, Firestar died the same way as Tigerstar had, just in a different day. Yes, that was when it all started and that was seasons upon seasons ago. Too many to count," I shrugged it off like it was no big deal.

But really, it was a *huge* deal. *We were counting on you, Firestar.*

"Do you think there's any hope left for us?" Icepaw meowed low, laying down again. "I'm not sure, Icepaw," I told her truthfully, "No one has ever been able to beat Poison, Scourge or any of the guards. It might be a waste of time to hope for something that far out,"

Icepaw nodded. Silence surrounded us, drowning me like water as it suffocated me, trailing down into my lungs. I couldn't stand the silence.

"Just imagine, Icepaw. Living in peace some day..." I scoffed so quietly I thought she hadn't heard me.

Icepaw turned to face me, looking me in the eyes. "You know that'll never happen." She growled.

"It will if we win." I replied, turning back to the view in front of me. The sun was beginning to go down. The sky was lit purple and pink at the horizon. I had to look straight up to actually see it. It dawned on me that we might not ever get out, becoming trapped souls in a dip in the ground where we would be met by the cats who have died.

I began to shiver, not from fear but because of the sudden temperature drop. I'd heard of it before, to quicken the deaths. *If we don't find real shelter, we'll die for sure! Think Feathertail, think...*

Glancing above, I searched for any holes in the trunk, but there were none like I'd hoped. I stood up and looked around, studying the trees. *We can't risk being on the ground again.*

I practically jumped up from the branch, spotting a hole in a trunk of a tree not far from the one we were sitting in. *At least two trees away plus a few branches to climb. That won't be much, right?*

I was wrong.

I was already doubtful about the whole sleeping-in-trees idea and to have to jump two trees over to actually get to shelter was very frightening. Being up high was not my specialty! *Just what I need, a heart-attack. I'm naturally a RiverClan cat, for StarClan's sake! I'm bound to fall...*

"Icepaw, we need to climb a few branches and then jump on the longest one to the next tree to get to the hole in that tree over there." I informed her, gesturing with my tail to the tree I was talking about. She shook her her pelt, nodding. Her teeth chattered as I began to push her farther up the tree trunk.

Puffs of clouds formed near our muzzles every time we breathed out. I helped Icepaw get started and as I shouldered her up, I spotted the ground below and the branch I stood on. My heart lurched in my chest as I focused on the ground. I noticed how the tree branch was starting to frost over. I looked over my shoulder when Icepaw got off it and saw the pigeon carcass was frosted.

If we don't hurry, we'll freeze! I'd rather get killed by that brat, Hawkpaw than freeze to death.

I climbed along with Icepaw, reminding her to stop at a long branch. It was a bit thinner than I'd imagined but it would do. "Let me go first," I ordered, my teeth chattering and my lips numb. The wind was tearing at my body, numbing my paws and face. I blinked several times, trying to keep the wind out of my eyes. I carefully

put one paw in front of the other and made my way to the edge of the branch. It was close enough to the tree in front of me, I was sure to make it. "Stay near the tree trunk until I get to the other tree!" I hissed without looking at her. She must have heard me because the branch didn't sway under another cats' weight.

I shook each paw individually, attempting to warm them up. I backed up a bit and before I could hesitate, I leaped off of the branch. Cold air shocked my belly fur as I extended my legs forward and grabbed the branch with my front paws. My hind legs dangled uselessly while I fought to pull myself up. Grunting loudly, I used all my strength to haul my body onto the branch. I backed away to the trunk of the tree.

"Why can't I c-climb down and m-meet you there?" Icepaw called over nervously, stuttering as the cold numbed her jaw. I looked to the ground again and pointed to a dead mouse; it must've been running for shelter too late.

"That mouse froze to death on the ground, hurry up!" I growled at her and she shook out her fur, shook out her paws as well and started breathing in and then out quickly. Icepaw ran forward and jumped off the branch. She extended her legs as far as they could go and landed onto the branch, first on all fours, then as she slid, her hind legs slipped off, leaving two paws hanging on.

I grabbed her frozen scruff and helped her up. "Lets go, I think my blood is starting to run cold," Icepaw groaned and I nodded in agreement.

There were two more trees, I realized, and they were even closer than I had thought. Stabbing my claws into the frozen bark, I pulled myself against the wind, keeping my eyes fixed on the branch below my paws and then to the den in the tree.

"It might be a tight fit, which is good for warmth but not for morning hunts," I meowed over my shoulder to Icepaw. She nodded with her head down, not responding. I looked forward again and hopped stiffly to the branch on the next tree. My paws kept slipping as the tree got to a major freezing point.

By the time we thought we were going to freeze to death - which was literally a couple of heartbeats later - we squeezed into the small hole in the trunk. I had swung my paw around in it, making sure nothing was in there.

"What happened to Lostface?" Icepaw muttered, her voice sleepy. Her pelt was frozen solid, but it was warming up after we settled down together. I had my chin over her head, her head in my chest and paws tucked near my stomach. I put my paws near her flank and sighed.

"Long ago, as an apprentice, Lostface was named Brightpaw. Bluestar didn't trust anyone - other than Firestar, who was Fireheart at the time. She refused to let the apprentices become warriors because of it. Only Cloudtail was made a warrior because Fireheart was his mentor," I began. Icepaw seemed to wake up as I told her the story.

"Lostface was beautiful and kind-hearted. But little did they know that dogs were killing the cats in ThunderClan, which Tigerstar - Tigerclaw at the time - had lured to Snakerocks. Swiftpaw was Brightpaw's buddy and he had suggested to prove to Bluestar that they were trustworthy and strong by killing whatever was killing the ThunderClan warriors,"

"I'm listening and all, but why didn't Bluestar trust anyone?" Icepaw murmured.

"Tigerclaw had tried to kill her and she had exiled him after that. She couldn't trust anyone other than Fireheart because he was part of a prophecy." I felt Icepaw nod and I kept going.

"So Brightpaw and Swiftpaw went to Snakerocks to find out what was injuring warriors. They both were attacked and during it, Brightpaw lost an eye and Swiftpaw died. Cloudtail and Fireheart found them and went to find help. Bluestar had gone cruel to the warriors of ThunderClan but the niceness was still there. Bluestar gave Brightpaw her warrior name, Lostface. Firestar changed it, but Scourge changed it back once he ruled the Clans."

Icepaw nodded, nuzzling closer to stay warm. "How'd you learn all

that?" Icepaw mewed quietly. "Cloudtail once told me, before we were enemies," I whispered, and with that, we both fell into a deep sleep.

Chapter 8 - Screaming Voices

The early morning call above startled Icepaw and I awake. Blinking open my eyes, I had to squint as the morning sunshine filtered through the entrance to the hollow tree. I looked around and caught Icepaw's gaze as she lifted her small head from her makeshift nest. Cool air was starting to change to the familiar warm air. Standing up, I glanced up into the dark tree. I noticed the whole trunk was hollowed out. I narrowed my eyes and took a step closer to the back wall. *Are those scratches?* Running a paw over the trunk, I could feel the several slices in the wood as my pads touched them. I looked to Icepaw, but before I could say anything, Poisons call came from above.

"Deaths of last night," Poison's voice was emotionless as usual. "Cloudtail." I waited for him to continue, but he stopped there. Anger shimmered through my thick pelt. *There should've been more deaths, that way I wouldn't have to kill so many cats to get out of this awful place!* My tail flicked to and fro, but the anger didn't stay long. I began wondering if Lostface was sad that her former mate had been killed. With a sigh, I guessed she didn't... she was as heartless as a fox.

An awkward silence remained and I wasn't sure what to say to break it. Icepaw's voice almost startled me as she muttered, "I'd hoped Hawkpaw was dead by now. You'd think they had a fight between all of them by now," She sat beside me, her fur brushing mine. I nodded, "Oh well." I murmured, climbing out of the hole in the tree and standing on the nearest thawing branch.

"We need to hunt. First, we should make a marker on this tree only we'd recognize. Just in case we need to flee up here." I suggested as the young apprentice followed me. Icepaw nodded, eyes narrowed in thought. *Would a scratch in the tree be enough? Or should I peel the bark off? Maybe I should leave something at the base of the tree?*

"What are you thinking?" Icepaw's mew drove me from my thoughts. I glanced over and then looked to the ground. It took me

a few heartbeats to reply. "Maybe we should peel the bark off the tree and leave a few scratches in the trunk," Icepaw nodded, standing and she began to climb down.

Before I could start to climb down, she paused. "How will we get up if it's so far from branches?" She called. Once she was close enough to the ground, I began to make my way down. My heart lurched as my hind leg slipped off of the slippery trunk. Catching myself, I swallowed a whine as my front claws ached from my weight.

"I'll do it to this tree and the one that we used to climb up and make our way over then." I groaned as I hopped off of the tree trunk when I was close enough to the ground. The grass was just starting to thaw, cold droplets soaking the fur on my legs. I shook out my paws and then the tip of my tail as it had trailed along with me into the ground.

Hurrying away, I glanced over my shoulder at the young she-cat. "Come along, we need to get started quickly so we can hunt." I called to her even though she was already on my heels.

"I don't think any prey would be out yet, it's too cold even for me!" Icepaw commented and I snickered, padding to the tree we had used to climb to the one we slept in. Together we peeled a chunk of the bark off and tore a few deep scratches into the trunk. Sticky sap stuck to my paw and I fiercely rubbed my paw on the wet ground in an attempt to get rid of it. "Ugh! This will take *moons* to get off..." I growled and, ignoring the sticks and dirt that was clumping up on my paws, began to pad to the next tree.

Standing back, I noticed it wasn't as visible as I had hoped. "Icepaw, continue on these trees. I'm going to grab something to make this one more noticeable. And don't make the tree we sleep in noticeable, if Hawkpaw finds it he'd probably come and kill us in our sleep." Icepaw looked over her shoulder to hear me better and nodded when I had finished. She got back down to all fours and headed to the next tree over. "Be right back," She mumbled an okay as I trotted away.

I searched the ground for something that would stick out in a dim forest. Something that would catch our eyes if we were running,

maybe even in the dark.

As I scanned through the trees, my eyes suddenly spotted a birch tree. *Perfect!* I ran over to it and started to strip what was left of the trees bark. It seemed that the wind had done a pretty good job of it, too.

I carried a mouth full of the white and black bark back to the trees to see that Icepaw was no where to be seen. I slowly and wearily stalked to the base of our tree, looking around with uncertain eyes. I dropped the bark slowly beside a root. Slowly, I lifted each paw and placed them carefully to make no noise. Breath quickening, I passed the tree I stripped but there was still no Icepaw. Then I neared the second one that Icepaw must've stripped, but Icepaw was still no where to be seen. I came to the tree we had bared together.

Where in StarClan's name is she? I wondered, my heart starting to hammer in my chest.

I fought the urge to call her name, scared that I would attract an enemy. *Am I really that cowardly? Isn't it a good thing to call to her, so if she is being attacked I would distract her attacker?*

Despite my fears, I called out to her. "Icepaw! Icepaw where are you?" I kept my voice as low as I could so it didn't echo through the mysterious trees. I didn't need anything after me, after all.

I saw a flash of white and I hurried over. All of a sudden, she leaped over me and began to chase something along the ground. My heart fluttered with relief and I sighed, sitting down. She was only hunting.

Icepaw padded over happily with a young rabbit in her jaws. "Awesome job, Icepaw!" I commented in awe. My eyes turned cold and I stomped my paw down to the ground. "I was scared to death, I though you were getting attacked! Why didn't you tell me before I left that you were going to hunt?" I growled and she flinched at my tone. I felt guilt creep up on me at my outburst.

"Sorry, Feathertail," She mumbled with the fur in her mouth,

shuffling her paws. She dropped the brown, furry rabbit. "I spotted it soon after you left and I thought you'd take longer so I didn't think you'd need to look for me..."

I sighed, softening my eyes and dipped my head to her. Touching noses, I responded quietly, "I was just worried. Take that up to the tree and I'll finish down here." Icepaw nodded and grabbed the rabbit, quickly scampering away to our tree.

Trotting to the roots I had left the white bark on, I snagged it and slapped it onto the sticky sap on the tree. With a growling stomach, I scurried up the tree and carelessly made my way across the branches. By the time I got to the den, the sun was up and blazing on my back. *I think I'll lay under the suns rays today, that is, if I can even find a place on the branch where the sun showers down.*

I licked my lips as I entered the hollow tree. "I waited for you to eat. You have no idea how hard that was!" Icepaw purred and I purred in return, even as I ate the first bite of the still warm prey.

"Good catch," I muttered through a mouth full of prey. Icepaw mumbled a thanks and kept eating. We were too hungry to even talk after that, eating every last morsel of prey that was on the young rabbit's bones. I devoured the last bite of my side of the rabbit and licked my lips. I began cleaning my fur to get rid of any knots or fleas.

"I'll get some moss to renew our nests and maybe a bird to have for later, we can use the feathers for the nest." I suggested. Icepaw nodded, cleaning her fur thoroughly as well. We cleaned our pelts so well, it was as if we were going to sit vigil for the ones we lost to BloodClan's Hunger Games.

I held back a purr as I realized how stupid that sounded. *Vigil? For the ones who died? We hadn't done that in seasons! Which is sad to admit, actually.*

I stood up after Icepaw had finished grooming herself, ready to leave. "I will go out to get moss and attempt to find a bird! Could you clean up the tree a bit? There's still cobwebs everywhere. Maybe collect them and leave them for an emergency?" I asked over

my shoulder and Icepaw nodded. I dipped my head in thanks and stepped out into the warm air.

Quickly, I climbed my way down the tree trunk and threw myself off the tree. Landing with a thud, I tried not let out a groan as the soggy leaf litter soaked into my pads. I sniffed around to find some soft moss. Paw step after paw step, I dragged myself away from the sight of the tree Icepaw awaited in. I started to become paranoid about bumping into an enemy and I had to keep my ears sharp and eyes wide open.

Stay calm, no one would be over here right now. Hawkpaw can't kill me anyway! He's... um... he should be a warrior but hey! He's still an apprentice, right?

I kept stalking, looking around the forest for any fluffy green moss. I scanned the trees, rocks and and flat grounds but there was none. *How in StarClan's name can there be none?* I began to look behind the rocks, my heart thumping so loud I was scared someone was going to hear it.

"Scared, Feathertail?"

A raspy voice came from behind me and I practically jumped out of my fur. I whipped around, instincts telling me to flee. I unsheathed my claws and stood my ground. I looked around but there was no one. Lowering myself down, I prepared for a fight. I didn't dare turn back to the boulder I stood in front of. Looking around with wide eyes, I backed into the boulder. My breathing came in short gasps and I fought the urge to run away to the tree. The nests were damp and old, I had to get moss!

After several paralyzing heartbeats passed, I whipped back around and sniffed around the boulder. Within heartbeats, I discovered the thick, fluffy moss. "Finally," I breathed. Relief washed over me as I peeled it off. Rolling it into a ball, I carried it away. I started to head back to the tree and halted as I found more. I ripped it off as quick as I could, suddenly feeling anxious... It felt like several pairs of eyes were burning through my skin and seeming to go to my soul.

I trotted off, trying not to seem like I was trying to get away quick, but failing miserably. "Where are you off to, Feathertail? Has something scared you?" A vicious whisper came from right beside my ear, as if there was someone beside me.

I gasped and whirled around, looking at every tree and every aspect of the forest. I fought the urge to let out a whimper so I bit onto the moss harder and ran towards the tree. There was no one. *Am I going insane?*

"If you run they'll catch you anyway..."

"You're going to suffer..."

"Come on, quit running away from your problems!"

"You're going to die like the rest of your kin!"

"You were supposed to die but Loudbelly took your place! How pathetic..."

The fur along my spine bristled up as anxiety pricked my heart. I took off running, climbing up the tree as fast as my legs would let me.

"Where are you going? To hide?"

"You can run, but you can't hide, Feathertail..."

"We know where you sleep!" The whispers seemed to speak directly into my ear.

Stop! Just shut up! I wanted to scream at the voices, but the voices kept speaking. *How am I supposed to block them out! They won't stop! Stop talking! Leave me alone!*

I took a deep breath, put a smile on my face and climbed into the den. I dropped the moss and looked up at Icepaw. Her eyes were filled with relief, but behind that was worry. "I thought you'd never come back, I started to get worried..." Icepaw mewed, making a small nest out of the moss.

"How did you manage to only get that much?"

"Wow, you really *are* pathetic!"

"What a shame. Icepaw doesn't stand a chance with a cat like you..."

"There was almost none out there, I will go back out later." I told her. Icepaw looked me in the eye and narrowed her eyes. She tried to ask something but I waved my tail in the air, silencing her before she could speak, "I'll be back, promise."

Chapter 9 - Surrounded

I had come back with a bundle of soft moss by the time the sun was at its highest point. Somehow I had missed most of it on my first trek. I assumed it was my high paranoia distracting me. The voices had left me for the amount of time I was concentrating and trying not to worry. I realized I just needed to keep myself occupied.

Laying on the branch, I finally had some spare time to relax. The sun was barely touching my fur but it was still warm where it did brake through the thick branches.

"Feathertail, whats that smell?" Icepaw's whisper came from the hollowed tree. I opened one eye to see her head poking out of the den. *She must be done making our nest and cleaning the tree.*

I sat up, lifting my chin into the air and parting my jaws to take a whiff. Immediately, I got some kind of... raunchy smell. I wasn't sure what it was; no creature had ever smelled like that before. "I'm not sure," I answered in a low voice, scanning through the trees with narrowed eyes.

"I'll go check it out, stay here," I whispered, climbing down slowly and quietly. My tail was quivering. Heart quickening, the voices came back...

"It's probably the dead smell of Loudbelly and Frostfur," One snickered. "Maybe they are alive again, but their bodies are rotten?" Another suggested, it's voice deep and raspy. "Maybe it's Crowfeather coming to kill you," A she-cat purred menacingly. "*Oh, Feathertail! Let me eat your flesh and we'll be live an eternal life together!*" The first one chimed and then the she-cat sneered, "Haha! She can only dream of that!"

The voices had become more annoying than frightening. "Shut up, will you?" I snapped, landing softly on the ground. They kept going. "We don't do as we're told," The raspy tom hissed. A new voice came, one that sounded like a young tom, "Yeah! Why don't you

just go and sob in the tree and wait for Crowfeather, or maybe Hawkpaw, to end your misery?"

"Maybe you should go back and lie in grief?" The she-cat retorted, letting out a purr.

"Yeah, and make Icepaw do all the work because you're so lazy!" The young tom mewed and then an almost normal sounding tom spoke, "You act like such a kit, a selfish one too."

Don't they ever shut up? I looked around, focusing on the world around me. *Just ignore them, they'll go away when I don't respond.*

I felt the ground tremble and the branches above shake. *Could it be The Horror?* Getting into a stalking position, I pushed myself forward. The fur along my spine spiked up as my instincts told me to run and hide. The voices had finally shut up, so I took that opportunity to listen as intently as I could.

A screech rose through the trees just tail-lengths away. I knew it wasn't Icepaw, it was more of a tom's voice. What ever was stomping around beyond the trees was definitely deadly and had attacked one of our enemies. *Good for Icepaw and I, but at the same time... just as bad. Once it's done with them, it will be looking for its next meal...*

The sound of tearing flesh made me gag, but nothing came out. As I gazed up, I spotted the creature tearing at its prey. It couldn't have been The Horror because it looked almost like a lizard that I had been forced to eat so many times in the muddy, marsh territory Scourge had taken for our "camp". Except this... *lizard* was massive, possibly five or six cats combined, just to explain the length... It's long tail had small spikes that probably wouldn't do any damage, but as it swung around, I knew it could knock the life out of any cat in its way. The legs looked like thick frog legs, but with dark green scales with occasional light green spots. Its back also had five rows of dull spikes lining from its neck to its tail.

As the monster feasted on its meal, it let out long, raspy groans. My curiosity got the best of me; I leaned in farther to get a better look. It's legs were too short to attack prey that way, so I assumed its

mouth must have been its weapon...

Suddenly, it threw the cat into the air. It wasn't much of a cat anymore. It's pelt and flesh dangled loosely from its bones, and chunks of meat flew around. My eyes widened as I witnessed the size of its jaws. Large, yellow teeth glinted in the shadows. The teeth may have been sharp, but the length of its muzzle was what shocked me. Miraculously, the creature caught the cat in its mouth. Its jaws clamped shut and a shiver rippled down my back as the sound of the cat's bones crunching under the pressure of its mouth echoed through the forest.

Brown fur speckled the ground and instantly I realized Mudclaw was the victim. My ears flattened. *It should be Hawkpaw!*

I backed away silently, keeping my eyes fixed on the green monster. As the monster became smaller with distance, I picked up my speed, scrambling away. With a thump, I ran into a thin tree, making the branches quiver and several leaves flutter down. I crouched down and watched through my horrified eyes as the lizard-creature turned around. Blood dripped from its jaws and I held my breath. *StarClan, if you can hear me, please save me!*

Relief washed through me like a wave crashing over head as it turned away, back to Mudclaw's torn body. I knew that Mudclaw's scrawny body wouldn't be enough to satisfy the lizard, so I bolted away, leaves and dirt spraying behind me as I dug my claws into the ground to grow traction. *With luck, I'll get away without the monster hearing.*

I climbed up the nearest tree with our markings on it and ran from branch to branch carelessly, jumping to the next tree. I almost missed, and I grabbed on for dear life and pulled myself up quickly, bolting with claws sunk in the branch.

As I neared the den, I was greeted by a cobweb. I let out a squeal of shock, banging into the tree trunk. I clawed desperately at my face to get the sticky silk off my face. Taking a leaf from the branch nearest to me, I got the rest off in a hurry and jumped to the tree with our nest in it. I gasped for air from the rush. "You wouldn't believe what I just witnessed!" I started, and then collapsed into the

hollowed tree. I expected the she-cat to perk her head up from the nest, interested through her usual groggy stare, but the little cat wasn't in her nest. *Where's Icepaw?*

Breath quickening, I froze. "Please don't tell me she went looking for me while that monster is on the loose!" I whimpered to myself and then hurried out of the den. My heart felt like it had rose into my throat. Without thinking, I leaped down from the tree. I managed to land swiftly on my four paws and immediately I parted my jaws to search for her scent. It was fresh - thank StarClan - and I started to follow it quickly.

I passed the rock where I had first heard the voices and turned when the steep slope came in front of me, where the Arena ended. Breathing heavily, I dashed after Icepaw's scent. It was stronger now and I started to feel like the invisible weight on my shoulders was disappearing.

I caught sight of her white pelt as she was retracing her paw-prints. "Icepaw!" I yowled, and she looked over at me. A limp crow dangled in her jaws. Icepaw's ears perked up and she seemed surprised to see me. "Where have you been? I came back and nearly died when I noticed you were gone! There's a huge monster on the loose, you cannot be out her on your own!" I hissed as we met.

She rolled her eyes. "You were taking forever so I went out for a hunt. I got that bird for our nest, too!" She mumbled through the bird's feathers. I sighed and shook my head. "That's exactly what happened last time..." I muttered but then let out a purr. "I'm just glad you're okay. I'm worried for you, that's all. That's a great catch, Icepaw. But you need to wait for me to come back to the nest before you leave anywhere. These woods are dangerous."

Icepaw dipped her head and we hurried along. I had to keep checking over my shoulder, fear itching under my pelt as if something was watching... When we got to the tree, I let her climb up first and I followed after I was sure there were no one following us. The smell of death and crow-food entered my nose as I began to climb. *The monster must be nearing.*

I came into the hollowed tree where we would sleep and sat down.

"Do not leave this hollow without me anymore," I started. From her nest, she looked up at me. "There is a monster out there, probably triple or more of my size. I saw it eating Mudclaw. It has super large teeth and a huge mouth. If I catch you leaving this nest without me... I will not let you back in."

Icepaw's ears shot up as I finished, eyes alerted. "What? Why?" Icepaw whimpered. Her eyes were wide with hurt.

There was a pang in my heart that almost made me regret what I had said. "Because if you have the guts to leave by yourself, then I'll assume you can live and hunt by yourself as well. I cannot keep running after you, it is dangerous out there for the both of us." I mewed with my chin raised.

To my surprise, the young she-cat took it responsibly. "Very well." Icepaw narrowed her eyes at me and then began taking the feathers off of the bird. I dipped my head and started to help her, taking each feather and carefully lining the nest with black feathers.

*****

That killed a bit of time that was left on our paws. My belly was satisfyingly full. While Icepaw groomed herself for probably the third time that day, I sighed. Padding out onto the thick branch, I glanced up at the sky. Poison wasn't watching down on the Arena like a hawk for once. *What is Crowfeather thinking of now? Is there a battle in Poison's camp? Is Crowfeather trying to calm the cats down? Is any one sticking up for what's right yet? Are there any cats dying, or has there been any deaths at all? Has anyone thought of me or* any *of us? Do you still love me, Crowfeather? I dream of you every night.*

Questions after questions swarmed my head like angry bees protecting their hive. I was dying to know. That's when the voices came back. I closed my eyes and let out another deep sigh. "Out of sight! Out of mind!" An unfamiliar cat purred.

"We'll never find our way back home." A young she-cat whined. "I think she's been here so long, she's going crazy!" The same raspy tom whispered.

"You're going to die a slow and painful death, like your allies that you left to suffer!"

"When will this be? I want to watch!"

Shaking my head, the voices faded away as I glanced at the ground below me. I practically jumped out of my fur. That same long, spiky monster was at the bottom of the tree beside the one I stood on.

The creature looked up at the trees and I flung myself backwards into the hollow of the tree. I peeked out with my ears flat to my skull and watched him look through the few trees that surrounded ours and then to the tree we had made a nest in. I felt Icepaw come in beside me, her fur brushing against mine.

"What is it, Feathertail?" She murmured, looking down as well. She scrambled back at the sight of the massive beast. "Wh-what *is* that thing?" Her voice was barely a whisper.

"That's the lizard-thing that devoured Mudclaw." I hissed solemnly, looking over at her and then back to the ground. Icepaw didn't get a chance to answer before I realized it had disappeared. I gasped, "Where'd he go? Icepaw! He's gone, that could be good but it could also be very, very bad." Icepaw remained silent and peeked her head out again.

I yanked her back in by her scruff. "Mouse-brain! What are you thinking? If it sees you, that could mean he'll stay down there until we go down! Stay here, I'll go check it out." I growled, wearily leaving the hollowed tree. *So... What exactly is the plan here?*

"Your plan is to be a mouse-brain and die!" An elderly she-cat muttered in my ear. It was so familiar it made my fur bristle up.

Ignoring the voice, I looked down and jumped carefully from one branch to the other, looking at the ground in search of the beast. It seemed like it had gone away. I gazed up at the hole we slept in and the branches above it. I knew the monster's short legs wouldn't be able to climb, but it was worth feeling relief anyway. I climbed my way back up to the branch beside out nest and I looked forward. Letting out a gasp, I once again fell backwards into the hollowed

tree. A misty cat stood there, its eyes wider than an owls could ever go. There was no distinct color of the cat because it was transparent.

"Icepaw! We have to go, we can't stay in this part of the woods anymore!" I yowled, grabbing her by the scruff. She refused to budge.

Icepaw unsheathed her claws and dug them into the wood underneath of us. "Let me go! I don't want to run around the woods! The sun is going down!" She squealed and I did as well as we flew out of the hollow. A large howl came from above and I rolled on the ground, away from where Icepaw landed. Both of us landed on our sides. The world around me was spinning and I found myself unable to breathe for a few terrorizing heartbeats. Aching pains pulsed through my body, but I forced myself to ignore it.

It didn't take long for my adrenaline to kick in. Even with a short of breath, I pounded away from the tree. "Come on..." I panted, but I soon noticed no paws steps were thumping beside me.

I halted. Icepaw wasn't coming. Glancing over my shoulder, I noticed she was still on the ground where we had fallen. I pelted toward the small she-cat, faster than I had ever ran before. I nudged her hard, but the she-cat didn't budge. I could see her flank rising and falling, so I knew she was still alive.

"Icepaw!" I screamed through clenched teeth. I looked up at the tree to see the ghost-cat was gone. I could hear large paws thundering closer and closer... "Icepaw! Wake up, wake up! Please, don't do this!" Icepaw's eyes finally blinked open and she tried to look up but my face was in the way.

Nudging her to her paws, I yelled, "Icepaw, you need to run as fast as you can, okay?" She mumbled something I didn't catch. "*Okay?*" My heart was racing as the trees began to tremble around us.

"Wha-? Run...? From what?" She mumbled, looking around. The she-cat swayed slightly.

The voices came back. "Just leave her! It'll be better for you,

anyway..."

I ignored it and replied as calmly as I could. "A monster, Icepaw. You need to run with me, can you do that?" As I finished my sentence, the monster let out a raspy growl.

"Yeah, yeah... I'll run." Icepaw mewed and before she could even finish, I was pushing her along. "Come on! Come on, run!" I yowled and she looked at me then over her shoulder. I breathed rapidly, hoping she'd come to her senses and run.

The monster let out another huge rumble, and it burst through the bushes. Its jaws were open, showing a large pink tongue and stained teeth. It's tail lashed as it tore after us. I let out a screech of pure terror, and I could feel - literally feel - Icepaw's scream as well.

Icepaw seemed to be stuck in shock. "Run!" I screeched at her, shoving her harshly. She shook her head and dashed off, dirt spraying in my face as I tried to keep up with her. "Thank StarClan... I thought I'd have to leave you!" I called after her and she looked over at me briefly, her eyes flooding with unease.

Branches from small trees and thick bushes whipped my face but I ran harder, pushing my limits. My muscles were burning like fire, my lungs ached and my brain was telling my body to shut down and sleep. I halted, swerving toward west as The Horror came into sight. It let out a screech.

"Go, go, go!" I yowled at Icepaw. Wolves came into sight and I gasped, turning east and running away. Icepaw's muzzle was touching my nose.

"We've been surrounded! Head back to the tree!" I yowled at her, and did as I said. I looked over my shoulder to see the wolves, The Horror, and the lizard-monster thundering toward us with hunger in their dark eyes.

Before I could register what was happening, I tripped over a root. Icepaw didn't come to my aid. I rolled into a tree, gasping for air, and opened my eyes to a dizzy world.

Chapter 10 - Monsters Love Blood

So, a few things have changed! Do you like the edits so far? Let me know in the comments or through private message!
*****

I looked around to see a dizzy world. I focused in and out as four creatures closed in on me. It didn't seem to register that I was being surrounded by fierce monsters. Instead, I mumbled, "Icepaw? Icepaw, where are you?" Sitting up, I looked to the side and my vision finally settled. Gasping, I tried to scramble to my feet to dash away. I was pushed back by the huge, furry paw of a wolf. Two wolves, The Horror, and the lizard-monster all surrounded me.

I breathed rapidly. The sun was beginning to go down and their eyes glowed with... was that humor?

"Where are you going to go now, Feathertail?"

"Gather around everyone to see the one and only Feathertail get ripped to shreds!"

"Poor Icepaw. She doesn't stand a chance on her own. She isn't smart *at all*."

The long, scaly creature slithered forward, a deep rumble vibrating my ears. Many of its fangs overlapped its lips and it's foul breath wrinkled my nose. I hissed, turning around in a hurry to face the four creatures. The monster slapped my down with one large paw and stood over me, it's fat belly crushing my hind legs. Teeth bared and claws extended, I tried to tumble away, only to be held in place by The Horrors' massive paws.

I whimpered as The Horror pushed away the lizard and stood on its hind legs. It grabbed me with its front paws and held me up by my paws, stomach exposed to them. I looked around, frightened

greatly. *If these four creatures don't kill me, then heart failure will!*

The monster took one claw from its webbed paw and put it to my chin. I watched through wide eyes as he sliced a line from where my began, down my throat, and to my chest. I let out a bloodcurdling screech of pain, and The Horror clamped my mouth shut. The lizard creature hissed, spitting in my face.

Blood was flowing like a waterfall from the deep cut. It stung so much I thought it was on fire. I wanted so badly to spat at the monster but it hurt to move in any way. I found myself spluttering, blood spitting out of my mouth. As I began to drown in my own blood, I watched the two wolves nod to the monster and leave, their heavy paws striding off into the darkness. *Maybe Icepaw will realize I'm in danger and come after me?*

"You're mouse-brained if you think she would come save you. She wouldn't have a chance against any of these monsters, and she knows it." The same raspy voice snarled.

The monster turned back to me, eyes bold and cruel. Hunger shone in its eager gaze. I let out a whimper, my eyes widening even more as it opened its large mouth. Without warning, the large beast tore into my exposed stomach. Blood poured out of my stomach and black waves started hovering in my eyesight. I tried to let out another scream of agony, but all that came out was blood. The monster continued to maul on my numb body.

White objects began to form everywhere, hazy and unreal. I looked around, my head falling backwards. The voices stopped, all sound around me stopped. The world around me didn't grow bright with a white light, instead my vision darkened and surrounded me like a thick cloud heavy with rain.

I lay with my paws wrapped around my bleeding stomach on the ground in a pool of my own, thick, crimson red blood. The darkness began to waver. My mouth tasted tangy. Through a misting gaze, I watched the two creatures go their separate ways. *Finish me off, you coward!* I wanted to scream at him with the boiling rage that steamed through my dying body. I couldn't even lift a paw, let alone unsheathe my claws.

My anger diminished as sorrow filled my slowing heart. *Icepaw is on her own.*

*****

Realizing my eyes were still open, I stood up. The moon was still out, and I knew it had only been a few moments since my last thought. It didn't feel cold at all, but as I gazed around I noticed the plants and tree trunks were frosted over. *Maybe I've grown immune to the cold?* I began to wander away, trotting toward the tree Icepaw and I slept in. *Icepaw will be so relieved I'm alright!*

As I trotted toward the hollowed out tree, I noticed the pain in my stomach was gone. I glanced under my chest and was shocked to see only a long scar in the wounds place. *StarClan must still believe in us, or I wouldn't be here, right?*

I passed trees, bushes, rocks, and logs and eventually came to the hollowed tree. Climbing gracefully up the tree, I shook out my fur and walked in. Icepaw was shivering in her thick nest, curled up on her own. Her back faced the opening to the hollow. *She must be terrified! Or did she just get into her nest from the frosty forest?*

"Icepaw, are you okay?" I whispered, padding to her. She didn't acknowledge me, didn't even look, flinch or anything to tell me she had heard me. "Icepaw?" I mewed softly, waving my tail in her face.

I growled, smacking my tail onto her head. It went through her head suddenly it washed over me. The realization that I *had* died hit me like a ton of rocks. *Oh, no... No, no, no!*

"Yeah, yeah. We already knew that, and you did too. Not a big deal." A voice hissed and I whipped around. It was one of the cats who had been chosen for the last Hunger Games, Streamclaw. He had just been made a warrior on the night he was picked out, he had been a strong warrior and all, but the last enemy had defeated him. He was dark grey with a light grey ear, his tail ringed with light grey as well, eyes a bright yellow that glowed in the night. Scars were speckled all over his body, but one long, pink one stood out on his neck.

"Were you one of the voices I was stuck with?" I growled, ears flattening to my head. He shot me a glare. "What? No, you were hearing them because you were going crazy." He spat, sitting down.

I rolled my eyes, softening them as I laid eyes on Icepaw. She looked around the den, eyes darting nervously. "Is there any way I can speak to her?" I whispered, turning slowly toward Streamclaw. He sat there, silent, for a moment, wrapping his long tail around his paws neatly as he gazed out of the hollow.

"Yes, but you need to concentrate hard. You can only speak through your mind to her mind." He told me without looking at me and I nodded.

Okay. Icepaw, its Feathertail... You're not alone. I know it's scary, but I'm here for you, forever and always.

I squeezed my eyes closed as hard as I could, concentrating. "No, no. You need to look into their eyes and stare into their soul kind of thing." Streamclaw commented. My fur burnt with embarrassment and I shook my our my fur slightly, clearing my throat.

Icepaw, its-

I was interrupted by Icepaw. She was breathing heavily, eyes wide and fur knotted. I realized now how messed up she was. She stood up and passed by me, so Streamclaw moved out of the way. Icepaw peeked out of the tree ever so slightly, eyes mournful and petrified.

"What a shame."

"Oh well, we all die anyway, right?"

"Just another sad cat, I'm afraid to say."

"Dramatic much? Like come on, she should be happy she's alone. Now she doesn't have to kill Feathertail, she did it herself!" *You are all* so *rude and ignorant. Just shut up! Now that I'm dead, can't you leave me alone? It's called '*Rest In Peace*' for a reason!*

She croaked, her voice low. "Feathertail's not coming back," Icepaw's tail went down as her hoped seemed to be torn away from

her. Her voice echoed through the hollowed tree and all over again, my dead heart was filled with dread and misery. I looked to see if Streamclaw was sad about this, too, but he had already left.

I glanced back at Icepaw. I had to look away. It was unbearable.

Chapter 11 - Cat Got Your Tongue?

Sitting beside Icepaw as she vibrated uncontrollably in the nest big enough for two, I looked down on her with despair piercing my heart. She watched the night go by, her eyes bloodshot and fur ruffled up. The moon had come to the highest point and outside was frosted over. Puffs of white air escaped her mouth as she breathed out. I followed her eyes and padded to the opening to the hollow. Gazing out, I watched the stars above twinkle through the gaps in the treetops.

Inwardly, I willed the young she-cat to sleep. Icepaw hadn't of even tried to fall asleep. It felt as if a thorn jabbed my heart, pity washing through me. I peeked over my shoulder at her as she stared through me, unblinking. Sighing, I decided to give it another shot. Padding to stand in front of her, I stared deep into her eyes. Icepaw seemed to look straight at me, as if she could see me again. But I knew she couldn't; her eyes moved as she scanned the Arena outside, pupils dilated and tail trembling.

Icepaw, it's Feathertail. I'm here with you. Go to sleep and when you wake, I'll still be here.

Her ear twitched but her expression didn't change even the slightest. Swallowing a growl of frustration, I got closer to her face and held my breath. I tried again: *Icepaw. It's Feathertail, I'm still here. Try to sleep, you need to be strong.*

She still didn't seem to hear me. I took in a deep breath. Closing my eyes, I rested my nose onto hers. It was cold and shaky. *Icepaw, please tell me if you can hear me. It's Feathertail. I'm here.*

Suddenly, her head jolted from my nose, a mixture of confusion and astonishment flooding her gaze. She looked around. A spark of hope flashed in my heart and I kept going. *I'm here, Icepaw. I can help you get out of this place.* Icepaw nodded, glancing around. Her eyes

washed over with sorrow. *It'll be okay. I want you to try to sleep now. When you wake, I will tell you more.*

Icepaw dipped her head and put her head onto her paws. My heart fluttered with happiness. *I did it! She can hear me! Oh thank StarClan...* "Promise you'll be here when I wake?" She rasped drowsily. Putting my nose to hers, I let myself purr. *Of course, I promise. I won't go anywhere.*

"Cross your heart and hope to die?" Icepaw whispered as sleep took over. I smiled, *I cross my heart and hope to die.*

*****

I jolted awake as the announcement of my death and Mudclaw's echoed through the Arena. *I wonder what Hawkpaw is thinking now? Are him and Ashfoot going to come after Icepaw now?*

As Poison finished speaking, Icepaw's head shot up from her paws and she took in a weary breath. She almost seemed to hesitated before she spoke. "Feathertail?" Icepaw whispered as she sat up slowly. I put my nose to hers. *I'm still here.* I replied, taking my nose away from hers. *This is going to be harder than I thought. If I'm going to train her and protect her, I have to touch her nose just to speak... I can't tell her things when she's fighting!*

Beginning to pace around the hollow, I pressed my nose to Icepaw's. *Come outside, we should begin your training.*

Icepaw tipped her head to the side but after a few heartbeats, she stood up and began climbing down. I easily jumped out and landed on my four paws as light as a feather. The leaves below me didn't crunch, and my paws didn't leave any prints in the softening ground. I watched the small she-cat slowly climb backwards down the long tree trunk. Hopping down, her paws thumped onto the ground. Icepaw glanced around the quiet forest, anxiety showing in her wide eyes.

"Feathertail? I thought I would be able to see you? I heard from a few other apprentices before that we could see the dead, so why can't I see you?" She murmured, her eyes darting from tree to tree

behind me. Icepaw spun around and looked up into the tree-tops.

I put my nose to hers when she stopped moving. *I'm not sure. I'll have to find another spirit and see what they say...* I replied. Icepaw nodded and flexed her claws into the dirt. Glancing around, I wondered where Streamclaw was. Quickly, I pressed my nose to hers, *Just sit for a while, I'll find someone.*

Icepaw sat down and continued to claw at the ground while I pelted away. I aimlessly headed through the forest, and noticed that every bush and branch I encountered, I drifted through with no movement. I halted at a boulder and glanced through the trees. "Streamclaw?" I called into the silent woods. Birds sang in the trees and a mouse scrambled out from under a root. Ears perked, I listened to the wind whip the branches above me. "Are you there?" I called out again. Trotting away, I traveled farther from Icepaw with my jaws parted for the toms scent.

Slowing to a stop, I strained to hear through the chatter of a squirrel above. "Yes?" The tom muttered, appearing through a bush. My heart leaped at his arrival but I forced myself to keep my fur flattened.

Dipping my head to Streamclaw, I asked, "Why can't Icepaw see me and why can't I move anything?" Frustration was threatening to leak into my voice and make it into a whine. I didn't need to sound like a kit, or desperate kit for that matter.

The toms ear flicked and he replied simply, "You need go to StarClan for that."

"Well how do am I supposed to do that?" I growled, taking a step closer.

"You can't." Streamclaw huffed, shrugging. "I've been stuck in this Arena for seasons upon seasons... You will be too." His eyes were dark and unreadable. I held back a gulp, suddenly intimidated. I fought to hide it, narrowing my eyes. I scoffed, taken back by it. "Excuse me?"

Streamclaw shuffled his paws and looking off into the distance.

"Look at me!" I spat and he didn't. I leaped in front of him and shoved my muzzle into his face. "I said, look at me!" My voice rose to a yell. Streamclaw's ears went flat to his head and he finally looked me in the eyes, though he kept his mouth firmly shut.

I will not let this tom go without a real answer! "There has to be another way. Please, I need to help Icepaw. She can't lose now. There are only two more for her to beat!" I begged, taking a step back.

Streamclaw sighed and rolled his eyes. "You can be seen by Icepaw for a quarter-moon. You cannot speak and if you do - even just a word - Icepaw will suffer something sinister and both of you will die. Forever." He scowled at me and I narrowed my eyes.

"What's the catch?" I muttered, tipping my head. Streamclaw sat down and neatly wrapped his tail around his paws.

The tom took a moment to reply. *Is he coming up with a lie?* "Swear on the life of one you love the most. If you speak, that also means that cat will suffer and die."

Hesitating, I wondered if it was worth it. But before I could decide not to, I dipped my head. "I swear on the life of Crowfeather that I will not speak while being seen." I raised my chin and waited for him to respond. Streamclaw stepped toward me and didn't say anything so I dipped my head again, suddenly nervous.

"Done."

Streamclaw placed his black nose onto mine and an burning energy soared through me like an the wind whipping through my pelt. Feeling like my body was being burnt from the inside out, I swallowed a scream. *I can't take any chances...*

I opened my mouth to thank him, and closed it when I remembered I could no longer speak for a quarter-moon. Streamclaw rolled his eyes and let out a raspy purr. "The rules don't apply to me, by the way." Screamclaw snickered and began to pad away. "For now, anyway. You have three questions to ask and then the curse will clamp your mouth shut."

Looking to my paws, I narrowed my eyes and thought for a few moments.

"Can I still talk to Icepaw through my mind, the same way I did before? Can I use my other question anytime I want?" I asked, my body trembling from the pulsing shock that wavered through me. Though the pain was beginning to fade, I realized.

"No and yes." Streamclaw replied with a humored glance. Rage boiled in my stomach and I fought the urge to claw out the toms eyes. *How am I suppose to tell her things now?* I hid my panic and let out a defeated sigh. *At least she can see me.*

Without another word, I dipped my head and began padding back. It was going to be much harder than I had imagined...

At the sound of my paws trekking through the woods, Icepaw turned to face me. Her face lit up and she bounded over to me. Touching noses, she let out a relieved sigh. "Feathertail! What happened to you? I thought I'd never see you again!" Icepaw purred and I opened my mouth to speak, but quickly closed my mouth. *Long story. Now... How am I suppose to tell her I can't speak?*

I pointed to my mouth with my tail several times and Icepaw tipped her head sideways. "You...?" She mewed, sizing me up. I shook my front paw from side to side. "No?" Icepaw narrowed her eyes. I shook my head. "I can't be near you?" I shook my head again, repeating the gesture faster. "I- I don't know what you mean, just tell me!"

I rolled my eyes. I picked up a stick and pointed it to me. "You..." Icepaw mewed with confusion written all over her face.

I nodded. Jabbing my throat with my paw, I mouthed "speak". "You were choked? That's why you're fur is like that?" I shook my head.

I put my paw to the side of my mouth and pushed it forward, away from it. Then I shook my head. "Can you not speak? Why-" I nodded immediately, urging her to realize what I was saying. She jolted back. "Oh! You can't speak!" I nodded. *Finally! For StarClan's sake...*

"Why?" Icepaw mewed and I looked to my paws, head dangling. *Oh, come on...*

I pointed to her with my tail. "Me..." I nodded twice and pointed to my eye. "Eye?" Icepaw mewed and I shook my head. She thought for a heartbeat then mewed, "See?" I nodded, a smile crossing my face.

I pointed to myself again and Icepaw muttered, "You." She narrowed her eyes, looking past me and began to think. "Me, see, you..." She mumbled to herself. Icepaw's tail started to go up and down, hitting the ground in what seemed to be frustration. "Me, see, you..." I nodded.

"Do you mean you can't speak in order for me to see you?" Icepaw mewed, hope in her eyes. I nodded and shrugged. I mouthed the words, "I guess" as well as I could.

"You guess?" She asked and I nodded. Icepaw nodded and gazed around the forest. I kept staring at her while she thought to herself. After what seemed to be seasons, she spoke again. "Well, I'm happy to see you Feathertail! I was heartbroken when you never came back... I didn't know what I was going to do. Either starve to death, or wait for the other two to kill themselves I guess. But now that I can see you, I feel so much better!" I stroked her spine with my tail and gave her a warm look.

Icepaw got into a crouching position and stalked around me in circles. "So, what about that training?" She purred. I dipped my head. *Let's see how this goes...*

Chapter 12 - Advanced Training

I padded silently with Icepaw at my side to a clear spot only about two tail-lengths away. The wind ruffled my fur, and for the first time in the past couple of sunrises, I actually felt alive. Though it felt wonderful to feel the ground beneath me and the breeze as it blew through my whiskers, something was off. It was almost like... I was *hollow*. It was like I sold my soul to the Dark Forest. I almost felt guilty, but there was no pang that came to my heart.

"Okay. Just show me what to do and I'll follow." Icepaw mewed, jolting me from my distant thoughts, and I nodded in agreement. *I'll start her off easy!* Getting down into a stalking position, I took a couple of slow strides and then pounced at a stick. Icepaw sighed behind me so I turned to look at her, only to catch her rolling her eyes. I stood up straight and blinked at her with surprise. The white she-cat flexed her claws into the ground, eager to learn. "Show me what you learned in *training*, back when we were chosen to come here! I know how to stalk, I've been trained for that well before we came here. I need to know more than the basics!" She complained. I dipped my head to her, thinking back to when I was in training.

I couldn't get those memories to come back. I couldn't even remember the guards' names anymore. I would have usually felt panic well up in my chest, but no feelings came through other than confusion. *Had Streamclaw taken my memories away from before I came into the Arena? Do I even feel emotions anymore? What a sly fox...* I wondered, narrowing my eyes into space. I actually *wanted* to feel the anger boil in my stomach, to want to go after the tom and to confront him, but as I sat there I realized Streamclaw had left out an important part to the agreement.

Icepaw's voice brought me back to reality. "Feathertail?" Icepaw nudged me and gave me a concerned look. I shook my head and fluffed out my pelt. *If I can't remember, then I will just have to come up with my own moves!* I decided, getting ready.

Getting back down into a stalking position, I stalked to the nearest

tree and climbed up it to about my height. Getting a claw hold on a branch in the tree, I balanced on it, grabbed onto the tree with my hind paws, and shot myself off of the tree trunk. Aiming for the stick I had originally pounced on, I landed on it and with a snap, it broke into half. I was grateful for succeeding on my first try, but again, I felt no emotion.

Standing up, I gestured with my tail for Icepaw to try. She stalked over, quicker than it should have been, and climbed to the same branch. Setting her front paws on the branch and grasping onto the trunk with her hind paws, she leaped from the tree and landed in front of the broken stick, a couple of tail-lengths away from me. As she landed, she rolled over her shoulder and swiped at me with a proud grin on her face. I didn't flinch, only stared at her.

Icepaw stood up straight and shook out her fur, sending leaves and debris flying from her pelt. I dipped my head for her to try again. Icepaw nodded and stalked to the tree and did it again, this time more careful and precise. She did the first part well, but landed clumsily. I gestured for her to try again. Icepaw tried and tried again, until the sun was at its highest point when she got it almost perfectly.

The growing apprentice sat down, out of breath. She had tried nonstop until she got it right. The last couple of times I didn't even have to tell her to try again. I dipped my head and thought for a moment, trying to think up another creative battle move. I held my paw up and she glanced at me, still panting. I nudged her shoulder, trying to silently tell her to stand.

"Stand?" She mewed and I nodded once. She dipped her head and I stalked toward her.

As quick as a snake, I leaped to the side of her and grabbed her scruff to pull her to the ground. She let out a shocked yelp; I let go as Icepaw's back hit the ground. "Oof!" Icepaw mumbled and I raised a paw at her stomach. She cringed, sudden fear flooding her gaze, so I stopped. I should have felt ashamed for scaring her, but no feelings stirred in my stomach.

I gestured for her to get up and try it. "Do I do that now?" She

asked, slowly standing up with her eyes locked on me. All I could do was nod once. The apprentice got into a stalking position. It was better now, her tail neatly wrapped around her left leg and her stomach just hovering off of the ground.

She stalked toward the tree, traveling lightly and making close to no noise. Through narrowed eyes, I judged how she made her way to the tree. Once to the destination, Icepaw sprung at a rock from behind it. I trotted over to get a better view.

"I need to practice on someone else, would I be able to use you?" She asked over her shoulder and I considered her question for a heartbeat. *Could she? What if I called out?*

I agreed reluctantly and took a few steps away from her. I was completely aware she was coming after me but I couldn't hear her paw steps. I watched her bunch up her muscles, preparing to leap. Suddenly, Icepaw had dashed to my side and had grasped my scruff in her jaws. I had to clench my jaw closed to keep myself from growling.

Cringing, I squeezed my eyes shut as Icepaw raised her paw. I peeked open my eyes and noticed an angry glare shone in her eyes, lip curled. I actually thought she was mad for a moment, but within heartbeats she smiled and lowered her paw. "How was that? Nod for good, shake your head for bad." Icepaw purred, sitting down. I nodded, a smile crossing my face.

Her face lit up with joy. "Awesome! Any other ideas?" She mewed and I narrowed my eyes in thought. *Let's try... this...*

I trotted to a random tree and began to claw at it, hopping around it on my hind paws. I swung my tail to distract the imaginary enemy - that was a tree for now - and ducked down every few heartbeats. After I made a full turn around the tree, I came to stand beside Icepaw again.

"Well that was... something..." She mumbled, a purr rumbling in her throat. I pointed at the tree with my tail and she hurried over and started to mimic my demonstration. She couldn't stay on her hind legs, though, and had to start over whenever she did. I didn't even

have to get her to try again because she was filled with determination.

She failed several times at hopping around the tree, but her failure didn't hurt her confidence. Icepaw kept tripping over her own paws and occasionally forgetting to claw at the tree. I was itching to yell out things on how to do it better, but the reminder that she would die brutally kept popping up into my mind. *Why couldn't they just mute me so I couldn't talk, for StarClan's sake...*

I padded away and heard her follow. She came to trek beside me, her fur brushing against mine. I glanced around to find a place with thick trees close together but all I could really find were trees too spaced out.

Halting, I decided to take what the Arena had to offer. I turned around and dipped my head to Icepaw. She watched through narrowed, thoughtful eyes as I padded to a tree. I put my back to it and, using my hind legs to boost my run, took off straight at the one directly across from it. Bolting for it, I jumped and kicked off of it and flew toward the tree I had started with. I kicked off of that one and hit the one only a few tail-lengths away and then began to make a diagonal pattern. I only managed to get through four trees before the trees were too far from each other to keep going so I let myself land wobbly onto the ground. As I headed back to meet Icepaw, she met up with me half way.

"That was really impressive!" She complimented me, her eyes glittering with amusement. She backed up at the tree I had started at and gave all of her strength to run at the next tree. Jumping as high as she could, Icepaw hit the center of the tree and bounced off, hitting the next one.

The sound of claws scraping on bark made me a shiver go down my spine. I followed lightly behind her as she shoved herself off the trees almost perfectly.

A scream came from behind us. Icepaw's paws missed the tree trunk and her stomach paid the price. I opened my mouth and slammed it closed, rushing toward her. *That was close... I almost yelled out to her!*

Icepaw was sprawled out on the ground, breathing heavily and looking winded. "I'm okay..." She wheezed, sitting up. I dipped my head and and grabbed her scruff to assist her in standing. "We need to see what that scream was." Icepaw growled, padding away.

Now, why would you do that? She's just looking for a fight! Maybe she just wants to get the final battle over with? Though, I wonder who it is. It could be Hawkpaw and Ashfoot being attacked by a monster? Or are they fighting for victory, thinking Icepaw has died already?

I ran up to her, trotting at her heels. As I followed behind the rushing she-cat, I wished I could urge her to stay with me and continue training. And for the first time since I made the agreement, I felt my stomach churn with unease.

Chapter 13 - Her Last Fight

We neared where the screams were echoing from - the river. *The Horror camps on the opposite side, so maybe Hawkpaw and Ashfoot got attacked?*

Icepaw got down into a crouch and I copied her, lowering myself to the ground. *Can they see me? I can't remember what Streamclaw said anymore! All that sticks to my memory is 'don't talk or you'll both die eternally'. Better safe than sorry, I guess!*

Soundlessly, Icepaw stalked toward river. From behind a thick bush we could hear the sound of claws scraping flesh. We rounded a group of thick trees and halted when we caught sight Hawkpaw and Ashfoot attacking each other only whisker-lengths away from the bush we were hiding behind. The young she-cat flexed her claws and her fur bristled up.

"I figured... These two can't stay away from a fight if their life depended on it!" Icepaw muttered.
In this case, their life does *depend on every little thing they do.*

Backing up as quiet as a mouse, Icepaw wrapped her tail around her paws and waited with her claws unsheathed. Her eyes were flooded with unease and impatience. *I bet she just wants to get it over with...*
"We should stay back and wait... I'll kill the last one alive and I'll win..." Icepaw glanced over at me. Touching my nose to her cheek, I gave her a sympathetic gaze.

I don't know... Hawkpaw is pretty strong and bloodthirsty. He'll do anything *to win!*

As if reading my mind, the apprentice blinked at me with affection. "Don't worry. I'll either be free or I'll be with you for eternity." There was a pang in my chest, and it actually surprised me. *Oh, Icepaw! I hope it doesn't come to that... You deserve the freedom.* It took everything in me to keep my mouth clamped shut.

Icepaw and I lay down flat on our bellies and waited cautiously for one of them to drop. I narrowed my eyes and concentrated on how they clawed so neatly at each other. I remembered briefly of the training and how their mentors *strictly* wanted *neat* claw marks; deep and neat. They'd be attacked if they didn't do it right or do it in time.

Ashfoot hissed at Hawkpaw, dodging a huge blow that was bound to make her fall. Her grey pelt was speckled with pink scratches, dark spots staining where blood had seeped out of her wounds. Hawkpaw had a long gash from his ear to his chin, making his teeth glow pink as he let out a snarl. Ashfoot came back at him by hitting his front legs with one hind leg, making him hit the ground face first.

Icepaw was watching more carefully through narrowed eyes. Her tail tip twitched on her front paws. "I'm watching to see Hawkpaw's weaknesses. Poor Ashfoot doesn't stand a chance with him," She whispered to me while keeping her eyes locked on the battle. I nodded and kept watching as Ashfoot managed to pin Hawkpaw down. The young tom seemed to be growing tired. I wondered how long they had been battling for. Ashfoot immediately raised her paw, her chest puffing in and out as she panted heavily, to give the final blow.

Before we could even see what had happened, Hawkpaw let out a triumphant yowl. Cutting deep into Ashfoot's stomach, she let out a terrified shriek. Immense pain and shock was shining in her draining, widened eyes. Hawkpaw pushed her off as her blood began to gush out of the wound and onto Hawkpaw. Her blood was sent flying as she crashed to the ground. It sprayed the plants nearby, some even landing a whisker-length away from Icepaw's paws. Ashfoot let out a whimper and stared off into the distance. The she-cat didn't bother to hold her paws to her wound, only lay there with her flank rising and falling fast, knowing there was no way she would survive such a deep cut.

Blood pooled around her and began to drip from her open jaws. Within moments, her eyes glazed over and her exposed hind leg gave a final twitch. *Icepaw... don't pin him down. If you're smart, you'll know not to...* I inwardly pleaded and watched through horrified

eyes as Hawkpaw kicked dirt over the dead she-cat and lifted his chin to the sky. *Is he waiting for Poison to announce he's the winner?*

With Hawkpaw's back turned to us, Icepaw left the shelter of the bushes and started stalking toward him. His tail tip twitched, but his ears didn't move, showing no sign that he could hear her. Silently, she gained up on him.

Don't make a sound... Don't make a mistake... You can do this.

I watched through narrowed eyes as Icepaw got so close to Hawkpaw that she could literally touch him with her nose. But instead, she leaped up onto him and pushed down hard onto his back. The tom let out a squeal of surprise. With her claws unsheathed, she raked his face and his throat.

Frozen to the spot, I hadn't of realized I was holding my breath. Hawkpaw let out a growl and bucked her off. Icepaw landed on her paws gracefully and charged at Hawkpaw, hitting him with her shoulder. Stunned, Hawkpaw hit the ground and rolled a few whisker-lengths away from the she-cat. His blood dripped onto the stained forest floor.

Icepaw avoided pinning him and went around him. Hawkpaw stood up, his legs shaky, and went to attack her, but Icepaw jumped from one side to the other. She jumped left twice then right, then left and then right. She jumped forward, lashing him in the nose, and then back and then skidded to the left again.

Hawkpaw gave her a confused look, his eyes glimmering with exhaustion, and let out an annoyed growl. He pounced at her, but Icepaw was prepared. He was only to be met with leaf litter and dirt in the face when she hit his head straight into the ground.

Hawkpaw let out a battle cry and stood up once again, eyes burning with rage and hatred. Icepaw gave him a look of satisfaction. The wore out tom jumped at her and managed to get her onto the ground. Icepaw grunted as Hawkpaw sunk his claws into her shoulders. She grabbed at the ground and tried to push him back with her hind legs but Hawkpaw was too strong. Even though the tom was weakened, he still had strength to him.

I urged myself to run in and save her, but I wasn't sure what that curse would do if I did. Streamclaw hadn't said anything about not fighting others, but I wasn't willing to risk Icepaw's life when she was this close to getting her freedom.

The bleeding tom let out a ferocious yowl, jolting me from my thoughts, as Icepaw scratched his eyes again and again. Screeching, he stumbled back and rubbed his eyes with his paws. Icepaw took the opportunity and gave him a hard shove. "You dirty foxheart! I'll kill you!" The stunned tom spat toward the ground. Icepaw followed him with slow strides as Hawkpaw staggered and tripped over a rock, landing on his back with a groan. She went around to his side and grabbed his neck as quick as a snake.

Sinking her teeth into his wounded neck, she lifted the dying tom up and a snap echoed through the quiet forest. An eerie feeling sent a shiver down my spine as the only thing that could be heard was the sound of the river and the birds singing above. Dropping him, she stood over him. *She did it!* I wanted to cheer her name, to celebrate, but as I realized I felt joyous for the she-cat and the murders before Hawkpaw's, I knew I had become no better than Poison himself.

Hawkpaw's paws fell from his eyes, his neck at an awkward angle; blood had dripped down the sides of his face, staining his dark tabby pelt. All of his wounds stopped bleeding in a matter of heartbeats.

Standing up, I hurried to meet her half way. Icepaw looked up with so much joy in her eyes I could have sworn she had actually gotten her warrior name. I had seen her around in camp and in patrols but I had never seen her or *anyone* look as happy and joyful as her.

I hopped up and down with her as she screamed, "I won! I'm alive! Feathertail, we did it!" I nodded and together, we hopped around.

Then Icepaw stopped. Turning to me, I tipped my head to the side as her eyes drained of happiness. "How can I be happy when you died? When Loudbelly and Frostfur died? When everyone else is in misery?" She rasped quietly.

I wouldn't of thought of that. If I could speak right now, I'd tell her, 'You're the only one that matters right now. You just won something huge and you should celebrate. There's nothing that should make you miserable. Those cats, they'll have their chances. The dead? They're with - hopefully - StarClan.' I hope she knows that soon, none of this will matter.

I stifled a sigh as she looked to her paws. I poked her and gave her a bright look. Smiling for her, I hopped away. She followed. "Where are we going?" Icepaw croaked.

I shrugged, pacing down to a trot. We came across a wolf, but for some reason it didn't notice us. As we came to trot behind it, the tall wolf kept its head forward and ears perked up. I halted as Icepaw and I exchanged confused glances. "Hey! Wolf, over here!" She called and I shoved her. *What is she doing? She won but what makes her think she'll win against that huge wolf?*

The wolf didn't even turn around, just kept going North. I watched it go and decided to head North, too. Within moments, we came across the huge lizard; it too was going the same way as the wolf. It didn't turn to us or even let out a rumble, it just kept slithering on.

Poison's call rung in my ears from above. "The dead: Hawkpaw and Ashfoot. Congratulations, Icepaw. You've won your freedom."

The Horror passed by, stomping his way to the front. It dipped it's head to us and I was taken aback. We came to the tree we had camped in and while I paused to glance up at it, Icepaw kept going. "Let's follow them, maybe we'll find the way out? Or someone to show us the way out?" Icepaw insisted. Blinking up at the tree, I noticed the same transparent cat with huge eyes was watching in the tree. My heart jolted, suddenly feeling vulnerable, and without a second thought I rushed after Icepaw. I could feel its wide, mysterious eyes burning into my pelt as I hurried away.

The Horror, two wolves, - another had showed up - and the lizard all followed each other to a huge cave. Guards were waiting there. The guards closed the cave up with some kind of wood mesh, like the silver mesh in Twolegplace.

After it closed up, Lostface, Crowfeather, and Brambleclaw came toward us.

They looked at me and then to Icepaw. It didn't seem to faze them that I was with her. "Congratulations, Icepaw, you've won the BloodClan Hunger Games," Brambleclaw mewed dryly with a nod, "Your reward is to leave the territories with someone of your choice. You will come back to the BloodClan camp to announce that you had won and to choose your partner."

The young she-cat dipped her head while I eyed Crowfeather. He didn't even glance at me, his eyes dark and emotionless. A growl threatened to creep up my throat.

Icepaw was safely guided away; I began to follow her. The tunnel came in sight and I sighed in relief. *I'm going to be free!* Poison was at the end of the tunnel waiting. He disappeared first and then Crowfeather and Brambleclaw with Icepaw at their heels and Lostface following in Icepaw's tracks.

Just as I began to go into the tunnel, I was forced back by an invisible force. I whipped around, but nothing was there.

Whats going on? Why can't I leave?

Then I realized that no one really leaves the Arena, your mind always sticks to here, even if you're alive. Panic welled up inside of me, a feeling of desperation washing over me. I glanced to my paws and watched them fade until I could see through them again. Icepaw glanced over her shoulder, only to be pushed onward by Lostface.

"B-but, what about Feathertail? I was going to bring her with me!" Icepaw whimpered, her voice echoing through the tunnel.

It was Crowfeather that replied, "Keep moving. She's dead, Icepaw," His voice was rough and showed no sign of emotion toward me. "Every cat who dies in the Hunger Games will suffer there for eternity."

His voice echoed in my ears, and for a moment, I stood there unable

to move. Fury boiled in my stomach until I couldn't hold it in. By then, Icepaw and the Guards had disappeared behind the door that had kept me in a horrific cage. I let out a screech and tore at the ground with my claws until the anger faded to loneliness. With my head hanging, I let out a sob of defeat. *What am I going to do?*

Streamclaw's voice came from behind, a purr of evil making the fur along my spine spike up, "Well, well. Icepaw *did* win. I had a bet with Vixontail that she'd die." I whipped around. I glared at him as he held his front paw up, examining his claws.

"Oh! I forgot to mention to you that this curse stays forever. And that you're stuck with us. What a shame, right?" Streamclaw purred, circling me.

Rage pulsed through my veins as a ball of emotion caught in my throat. *No. This can't be happening. I need to find StarClan. StarClan has to exist still...*

Streamclaw gestured with his tail to follow. "Come along now, the fun has just begun."
I hesitated. This was the last place I wanted to stay.

Epilogue

It was finally happening. I was out of the Arena, soon free to do as I please! I had never felt so free in my life! I could run, I could *explore*! There was no longer a worry about anything. No more worries about the size of the prey I had to bring back to camp, no more need to impress my mentor to avoid a scolding. Though, in the back of my mind I knew the paranoia that had built up over the time I was forced to live with an ear always alert would always make me an edge.

Ducking out of the tunnel, I took a whiff of the fresh air and took a glance around. My heart fluttered at the sight of the open sky and the clouds that glided across. *Soon, I will be able to swim and eat fish as I please! I don't have to worry...* It seemed surreal as I took in the wide field and the other territories off in the distance. A chilly breeze stirred my pelt as dread washed over me. *Feathertail! I didn't even get to say goodbye...* The fur on my shoulders stood up as the shocking reality that the cat who had stayed with me until the end had to suffer the greatest horror of them all: living for eternity in the hollowed out moor that had become a deathtrap. I attempted to swallow the ball of guilt that sat in my throat and peeked over my shoulder at the gaping tunnel.

I'll pray to StarClan for you, Feathertail. And for Loudbelly and Frostfur... Even for those cats who were killed there seasons ago... I'll pray for them all! I promise! I silently vowed to Feathertail.

Lostface's harsh voice brought me back to reality. Snapping my head toward the scarred she-cat, I realized they had already started to head toward BloodClan territory. She paused to explain, "Icepaw, you will come back with us and we will show the warriors of BloodClan you won. You will choose a partner to leave with you and then we will take you to where you never come back, do you understand?" Nodding, I took in a deep breath and hurried to trot in beside her.

The guilt remained in the pit of my stomach like a rock. I couldn't

shake the fact that all of those hate-filled souls were stuck in the Arena, including the original Arena! Without thinking it through, I turned to Lostface and murmured, "Is it true that if you die in the Arena, your soul is trapped forever?"

The one-eyed she-cat didn't look away from the group in front of us. "They never leave." She replied with a flick of her badly torn ear. I wanted to run back to Feathertail, to comfort her and stay with her... But I knew she would want the best for me, not to sit and pity her. *Maybe the best for me is to free the tormented souls of the Hunger Games?* My thoughts began to wander. *Can she speak now? What will happen when she does? Will we both die? Does StarClan know she is trapped? Will they help her get out?*

We neared the small river that trickled its way down from the Moonpool and into the lake. One by one, we each strode through the stream. I personally was never a fan of water, but luckily the small river was shallow and there was barely a pull from the current. Confidently, I hurried across and hopped out of the water.

Within what seemed to be heartbeats, we entered the silent camp. The ground was thick with mud and the clearing was crowded with cats. Ducking in through the entrance, I braced for the awkward stares of my Clanmates. I'm the last one they would have expected to of lived... Pelt hot with embarrassment, I forced myself to raise my chin as I strode toward the front of the camp, where Poison sat waiting. His tail was neatly resting on his paws and his eyes had a glint of impatience. Nonetheless, the BloodClan leader dipped his head to me.

Lostface gestured with her tail for me to go and stand beside him. Hopping up to the rotting stump at the back of the camp, I stood there. I had to face every cat down there and suddenly, I felt a wave of nausea at the amount of faces staring back at me. Spotting Tawnypelt and Deathpaw, I noticed their expressions were filled with shock. As I glanced around at the cats below, I realized almost *everyone* was shocked. Some just simply didn't care.

Poison broke the silence, speaking to the grouped cats with a purr rumbling in his voice. "We are gathered her today because Icepaw has won the BloodClan Hunger Games," My heart started to beat

quicker as he clearly wasn't taking the announcement seriously. He turned to me and retorted, "To be honest, Icepaw, we had thought Hawkpaw would beat you on the first day. How'd you do it?" Poison announced and I gulped. Hushed purrs and snickers of agreement came from all of BloodClan. *How dare they make fun of me!*

"Well... I had help from Feathertail. Our alliance was great and after she was killed by one of the many horrific creatures in the Arena, she came to me as a spirit and helped me learn better techniques to kill." I told them, adjusting my posture to sit up straighter.

A few of the cats below were murmuring to one another with their eyes locked on me. I wished I could hear what they were saying, but at the same time, I was glad I couldn't. StarClan only knew the awful things they could have said. "I thought Feathertail and Hawkpaw would be the last ones alive, that's why I chose them. But you proved me to be wrong," Poison sneered, "I think *everyone* thought that." More purrs rippled through the camp and my pelt burned with embarrassment.

Before I could reply, Poison kept going. "And now, Icepaw, you get to choose one cat to go with you. Choose carefully..."

Suddenly all of the amused and nonchalant faces switched to hopeful as they eagerly glanced up at me, hoping to be picked. Narrowing my eyes, I scanned the cats and took my time choosing. *Deathpaw was always a jerk, Tawnypelt never noticed me. The only cats who had actually been nice to me, were Feathertail and Frostfur and neither are here anymore...*

Giving a stern nod, I faced Poison once again. "I choose to go alone." Most of the cats in the crowd gasps, and even a few of them let out snarls and growls at me. Clearly, everyone was hurt. I fought the urge to take it back, suddenly knowing how they felt. Poison gave me a look; he was unsatisfied and the amusement that had glowed in his eyes had disappeared.

"Not even your mother? Your brother? Why chose no one? How could you be so selfish?" Poison asked, his dark eyes watching me like a hawk.

"Yeah! Don't you care about any of us?" Graystripe called from the back of the crowd.

"What are we to you? Crow-food?" I heard Deathpaw spat from beside our mother. Tawnypelt had her tail wrapped around his shoulder, her eyes fixed on me.

Facing the Clan, I decided to be straight forward with them all. "All my life I was shoved around and bullied because I was smaller and weaker. I knew from the moment you called my name that you chose me to see that I died, because I was no better than an elder in your eyes," I cast Poison a glare. "So I tried with everything I had in me to be strong and useful for my allies, Loudbelly, Frostfur, and Feathertail." I paused. "From now on, my name is Icefeather. Winning the Hunger Games brought me here, and for once, I'm satisfied by your decision Poison."

Poison's tail twitched but he let me keep going. "Maybe one day, the warriors of the true Clans will come together and fight for our home again... Maybe then, StarClan will come back to guide us. Be strong everyone, and may StarClan light your paths..." Silence followed my speech. The BloodClan leaders fur had spiked up down his spine, but he kept his cool.

No one spoke as I jumped down from the rotting stump and headed out of the camp with my head and tail high. The crowd of cats parted into two groups, leaving a path open to lead me out of the depressing camp. Ice looked up from the side of the camp and narrowed his eyes at Poison. Though I figured Poison had seen him do so, the leader didn't reply. I could feel every cats' eyes staring through my pelt as I ducked out of camp.

Without a worry or care in the world, I let the wind choose my destiny. I followed the breeze and aimlessly traveled to a new home, a place I could start over in. Behind me lay all of the death and bad experiences I had suffered through. It was all in the past now, and I could wander freely knowing I would never have to go through any teasing or life-threatening battles ever again.

For the sake of Feathertail, I will be free. One day you too will be free to explore in the endless hunting grounds of StarClan.

Downfall of BloodClan

A few people have asked for me to continue the book, and I have thought for a while on what I should do... I thought maybe do another Hunger Games battle, but it would take too long and I'd rather not - though once Reedstar's Selfishness is finished, I might do it and change this chapter around later on...

October 15th, 2017: I have a few ideas on continuing BloodClan Hunger Games, and Reedstar's Selfishness too. Looking back on my books from 2 years ago or more makes me want to do a more realistic version, hence why I edited a couple of my books lmao. Hope the book is better than it was!

Without the dead cats I had sent to the last Game, BloodClan had grown soft. Many whispered to each other at the edges of camp with their heads bowed in secrecy. Most patrols stayed out of camp more than usual and would only come back with a couple pieces of prey and no reports. There were only a few cats I could still trust. Ice was born to be a BloodClan leader, I could see it in his cold eyes and hear it in his menacing voice when he would scold the apprentices or demand more prey to be brought back.

Brick had always been loyal to BloodClan, even before I was taken in by Scourge, but it was obvious he was a bit more soft than the rest. He didn't ever demand, he asked politely. Now Brick was growing old and weaker as the sunrises came and went. A couple of the apprentices still tried to impress me, but the majority simply avoided any confrontation. Even my guards were growing distant, including Lostface. *I bet they don't think I notice...* For the past quarter-moon it had been nothing but hushed voices and uneasiness. The only cats who really spoke to me were Ice and the guards. The rest of BloodClan would keep their gaze down and pretend they didn't see me. Even Bloodcreek and Deathmist, new bloodthirsty warriors, walked past me like I was no more than an elder.

A moon had gone by since Icefeather had left me silenced from her speech. There had barely been a fight, let alone an argument. Only a few had broke out over the last morsel of meat; they mainly only talked to their own groups and kept to themselves. My paws were itching to see blood spilled again. *It's been so calm for so many sunrises... Cowards! Icefeather might have actually gotten to them...*

Silently, I lay under the shade of a thick patch of bracken, my flank and the ground beneath me lined with stripes from the sun shining through the leaves. The clearing had begun to dry out from the lack of quarrels; spouts of grass had started to pop up here and there. Pine needles and dead leaves were littering the ground again. There had been many rainstorms, but none were heavy enough to seep far into the ground to keep mud in the clearing from the many paws that trampled through daily.

Flicking my ear, I narrowed my eyes at the cats talking with each other. At the entrance to the camp, Tawnypelt had her three eager kits bouncing around her paws. She was speaking to Jaggedtooth and Brambleclaw, who were on guard in the camp. Those guarding in the camp made sure no cat left without reason. Tawnypelt's ears went flat to her head and her tail flicked to the nursery off on the far side of the clearing. Jaggedtooth bared his teeth while Brambleclaw reassured the guard. After only a few more moments of convincing, the two guards allowed the queen to leave camp with her kits. Brambleclaw touched his nose to his sisters ear as she padded off. *He too is growing soft...* Squealing with delight, the kits hurried out with their mother hurrying to keep up. Jaggedtooth caught my eye for a split heartbeat, annoyance flooding his amber eyes, but I didn't stare for long. Instead, my gaze wandered the clearing.

Beside the nursery, Timber and Snapper were talking to each other with their mouths full of prey. Closer to the left side of me, Rowansting and Sorreltail were sharing tongues under the shade of a boulder. *Disgusting,* I thought with a wrinkle of my nose. There was no room in my mind for a she-cat to worry about, let along a bundle of fur-balls biting my tail and clawing at my back! I had no envy toward the queens with their needy kits.

In the corner of my eye, movement at the camp entrance caused me

to jerk my head to see who was entering. Willie was leading his patrol back, each of them carrying fresh-kill. Beside him was Minty, striding in step with the white tom toward the fresh-kill pile that was set beside my den. Boulder, Mistyfoot, Rainwhisker, and Ocean hurried to the pile to deposit their catches after him. Rainwhisker's catch was puny and distasteful. The shrew almost looked like it had already been dead for several days. Meanwhile, Mistyfoot placed a plump pigeon on the top of the growing pile and then began to pick through.

Ice's voice came from the center of the clearing. "Mistyfoot! Brackenfur! Onewhisker! I want you three to take Dagger, Silence, and Mothpaw out for training in the moorland. This will be one of the final assessments for them, remember!" He demanded. I could have sworn Mistyfoot rolled her eyes as she trotted to the front to wait for the apprentices. "Longtail! Deadly! Hoot! You three can take Onewhisker's kits out for training as well." Onewhisker murmured to his three kits and then hurried out with his own patrol.

I turned my attention to the seven kits that were each playing moss-ball. It seemed like they had made groups and were trying to get it in the small holes they must have dug out on either side of the medicine den. Violet and Russetfur were sprawled out behind them, their flanks rising and falling slowly. I wondered if they had fallen asleep. But as Lionkit dove for Bumblekit, who had the ball of moss grasped in his jaws, they tumbled into Violet. She let out an annoyed growl and shooed them away. After watching them play for a few moments, she rested her chin on her paws again and let her eyes close.

Over by the apprentices den, Tess was sitting in front of the new apprentices, Piercepaw and Breezepaw. The two she-cats gazed up at the grey she-cat in awe. *She must be telling one of her over exaggerated stories again.* I quickly looked to the opposite side of them as a flicker of movement distracted me. From beside the stump I used to make announcements, Bloodcreek and Deathmist sat together with their heads ducked close together. Deathmist's fluffy tail tip was twitching. The two were muscular, tall toms with short tempers and fearless attitudes. They were one of the only cats

who would come back with injuries. From where, I had no idea and no interest in knowing.

The two suddenly stood up and headed toward the entrance, interrupting my thoughts. *Where are they going now? If they're going to fight random cats, why not fight the other BloodClan cats?* A growl crept up my throat. The two were allowed out within heartbeats, but it was nothing to make a fuss about.

The BloodClan deputy rushed over to the grey she-cat. "Tess, if you're going to sit there and talk nonsense to those two apprentices, why don't you make yourself useful and take them out for training?" Ice retorted. Tess's whiskers twitched with amusement but nodded reluctantly. With the flick of her fluffy tail, she lead the way out of camp with the two eager apprentices following close on her heels.

As Blackclaw escorted Graystripe, Fang, Dustpelt, and Dawnstripe out of the camp behind Tess and the apprentices, Cinderpelt and Littlecloud poked their heads out of the medicine den. The two nodded to each other and trotted out. After watching the old tom follow the injured grey she-cat, I noticed Littlecloud was noticeably frail. He was weakening as the long sunrises went by. I guessed he wouldn't live another season; he would be just another mouth to feed by then and would be useless to the Clan... His once shiny tan tabby pelt was now rugged and his muzzle had visibly turned grey.

The two medicine cats paused to talk to Brambleclaw and Jaggedtooth when Mudfur and Barkface scurried out of the den. The four of them usually spent most of the time in their dens and it almost agitated me that they were trying to leave. The two guards didn't see any problem with what they had asked, and let them leave with a nod.

A sudden burst of anger churned in my stomach. *They all come and go as they please, eat what they want, do whatever they want... What has BloodClan come to? Scourge would have never allowed this much freedom!*

I stood up and unsheathed my claws. A growl was rumbling deep in my chest as my tail whipped from side to side. A few eyes glanced my way and paused out of curiosity, possibly even fear, to see what

I was doing. I spotted Rainwhisker digging through the fresh-kill pile. "Rainwhisker!" I yowled to the dark grey tom. Jerking his head toward me, he lowered his head and murmured, "Yes, Poison?" His ears went back and his eyes flashed with both worry and caution in his eyes.

"Where's Sootfur?" I snapped, taking a few slow steps toward him. Eyes narrowed, I could feel the blood roaring in my ears as I waited for the scared tom to reply. Rainwhisker straightened up and almost seemed to relax. His calm reaction only fueled my anger. "He's training. Ice sent him out earlier-" Rainwhisker replied evenly before I interrupted, "Well go get him! I want him here. Now!" I exclaimed, standing up to shove my muzzle in the toms face. He didn't reply, Rainwhisker only scrambled away, nodding as he dashed out of camp. Murmurs of the remaining cats echoed among the camp as they wondered what was about to happen.

The voices around me buzzed in my ears and within moments an unexpected burst of rage escaped. "Shut up, all of you!" I spat at the crowding cats. Instantly they all grew quiet. *Why can't these stupid excuses for cats just do things right?*

We all waited in an awkward silence until Rainwhisker padded in with his brother Sootfur. Sootfur looked more puzzled than frightened while his brother gave me a stern look as they headed toward me. I sat with my tail neatly wrapped around my paws, waiting impatiently for them to get past the many cats sitting around. Each cats' eyes had eagerly followed the brothers as they entered. Even the group of kits that had been distracted before were watching from beside their mothers. Tension quickly filled the camp.

"You asked for me, Poison?" Sootfur meowed with his head tipped to the side.

Ignoring his question, I ordered, "Everyone, gather around." Though every cat in the camp exchanged confused glances with one another, they listened. "Sootfur, Rainwhisker," I began, circling the two alarmed warriors. Sootfur's eyes darkened. "As loyal as you two have been, I noticed Rainwhisker has been bringing back pitiful fresh-kill. We do not accept such depressing offers." I challenged the

two. They looked at each other, guilt glimmering in Rainwhisker's blue eyes and shock in Sootfur's amber gaze. Sorreltail shoved past the cats that had crowded in front of the two toms.

"The territories are deserted! You know my brother would never-" The tortoiseshell-and-white she-cat pleaded, but was cut short as Ice pushed her back. She tried to get close but I raised my tail and demanded silence.

Before the two brothers could argue or defend themselves, I went on, "As your punishment, you two will fight to the death." I purred, halting in front of them. I noticed the two swallowed and that their tails were trembling. Sootfur was hiding it a bit better than his slimmer brother, but I could still smell the fear wafting from his bristling pelt. *Perfect.* My smirk grew to a wide, eerie smile.

Finally Sootfur managed to speak. "Poison, I can assure you-" Sootfur made that purring sound where I knew he was frightened and trying to reassure me as he tried to convince me otherwise. Anger sparked through me and without thinking, I sneered, "I'm the leader and you will do as I say!" My eye twitched and I flexed my long claws into the dry ground. I longed for the clearing to be sloppy with blood again.

The two didn't move. "Where do you think BloodClan's name came from? Blood will be running at your paws and staining your minds whether you two like it or not! Now, *fight*!" I shouted in their faces. I was shaking with fury; I felt like I was going to explode. The wind picked up speed and my fur was sent into knots. Sootfur gave his brother a sympathetic look while Rainwhisker stared at him with his mouth wide open.

Sootfur slid out his claws, with his eyes closed and his face staring at the dirt. Rainwhisker took a step back. I heard Sorreltail let out a whimper from the back of the crowd. "Attack!" Yowling as loud as my voice would let me, I felt my chest tremble from the effort. And with that, the two brothers had no choice but to battle.

I could feel myself ease as I watched the two slash at each other. At first Rainwhisker didn't lay a claw on his brother, but as Sootfur swiped his nose and ears, the dark grey tom started to get mad.

Rain began to sprinkle down as the toms battled. Wet dirt was sent flying at the cats watching as the two brothers dug their claws into the wet ground, trying to keep their balance. Rainwhisker managed to cut Sootfur's eye, and as he yowled with pain and staggered backwards, Rainwhisker sheathed his claws and hurried to his side.

The rain started to pour down. "I said fight to the death, not help him when he's down!" I snarled through the heavy sound of rain hitting the ground. I noticed that many of the cats watching were hissing to each other; only the BloodClan cats were watching attentively, their eyes filled with eagerness.

Rainwhisker had no choice but to continue attacking his brother. Sootfur let out a shriek as Rainwhisker's claws sliced through his neck. Rainwhisker's eyes were filled with terror and he began to hesitate. Sootfur stared at his brother with nothing but fear in his eyes. Within moments, he collapsed onto the ground as his blood flowed from the wound in his neck. Stunned, Rainwhisker stood in front of his brother with guilt shining in his blue eyes.

Sootfur's amber gaze was dimming by the heartbeat. "Finish him off you mouse-brain!" I yowled. The grey tom gurgled and, while blood trickled from his jaws, Rainwhisker bent over his brother. Glancing over at me with his lip curled, he snarled, "Over my dead body..."

"No." I demanded, my voice a deep growl, "Finish him or I will!" I glared at the pair of them, unsheathing my long, sharpened claws. *Cowards!*

"Leave them alone, Poison. Haven't you already caused enough pain?" Lostface shook her head as she padded over to the dying tom as he lay in the mud.

I was taken aback. The fur along my spine bristled up and I glared at the one-eyed she-cat as a growl rumbled deep in my chest. "Who's side are you on?" I sneered low, baring my teeth.

"Our side." Onewhisker pushed his way through the cats in the clearing with his chin raised. Coldpaw joined in, repeating Onewhisker's claim, along with his other two kits. Most of the patrols had come back, including the medicine cats. Barkface

padded over with Cinderpelt beside him and the two other medicine cats. Barkface and Mudfur pushed Rainwhisker aside gently as they began to apply cobwebs to the wounded toms large gash. Sootfur didn't look alive, but as they pressed on his neck, he opened his eyes.

"Oh, really?" I scoffed as I flexed my claws into the ground. Onewhisker unsheathed his claws and began to growl. I looked around at the original BloodClan cats. Brick sat at the edge of camp with Boulder, both avoiding eye contact. Ice looked baffled but said nothing. Jaggedtooth, Flame, Snake, and Claw had their claws unsheathed, looking around at the original Clan cats, ready to spring into action at any moment. I let out a loud purr and murmured, "So this is how it's going to be, is it?"

Jaggedtooth and the few others that remained on my side came to stand beside me and behind me. Each had their claws ready for a fight. Crowfeather, Brambleclaw, Blackfoot, Longtail, Mistyfoot, Mousefur and plenty others - including a few BloodClan cats, like Ocean and Snapper - pushed to the front and unsheathed their claws.

"We're sick of the unnecessary deaths! It's our turn to take back the territories once and for all." Blackfoot announced, his teeth clenched.

"Idiots!" I sneered. "You will pay for your foolish decisions! For all the cats who actually are loyal to BloodClan, attack these cowardly Clan cats. We don't need these weak fox-hearts to rule the forest!" As Violet and Russetfur gathered their kits up and hurried out of camp, I gave a demanding caterwaul, and with that the few remaining BloodClan cats dove into battle.

Lostface, Onewhisker, and Blackfoot all lunged at me while the others attacked each other. I hissed at them and slashed Lostface across her cheek and then turned to Onewhisker to give him a hefty blow to the chest. Blackfoot shoved me with his shoulder and, falling to the ground, my back skidded in the mud. The cold, squishy substance clumped in my fur and seeped through onto my skin.

Onewhisker pinned me to the ground before I could stand while Lostface wiped away the blood that was starting to ooze from the wound I had given her. She was soon attacked by Jumper. Blackfoot was then attacked by Jaggedtooth while Onewhisker started to slash at my face. While I swiped his face, I kicked at his stomach as well. Even though I managed to cut deep into his chest and his soft belly, he didn't seem to notice from the adrenaline pumping through him.

The lean mottled tom continued to swing, hitting my cheek and then my exposed throat. Blood splattered all over Onewhisker's face, but he blinked it out of his eyes and kept hitting. I tried to bite down on his throat, but as I reached for it he slashed my eye. Letting out a howl of pain, it gave him time to bend down and sink his teeth into my neck. I gasped, but hardly any air went to my lungs. As he squeezed my neck, I felt the world around me begin to spin and darken. Struggling to free myself, I began to kick at his stomach again. The pain must have been too much to bare because instead of killing me then and there, Onewhisker backed off.

I flipped over and as I attempted to gasp, it came out as a sickening gurgle. I could feel the warm blood seeping from my throat. My eye throbbed and burned as if a bee had stung me. Stiffening, I refused to move. Any movement would open the wound more and cause me so much pain it made me dizzy. I lay there in the mud and rain with my claws dug deep into the ground. Widening my eyes, I realized all the cats in the muddy water and blood soaked ground had stopped fighting and were watching me as I weakened. "You're all weak... disloyal... cowardly pieces of fox-dung!" I hissed through clenched teeth.

Through draining eyes, I watched the remaining BloodClan cats start fighting again. Jumper lay in a curled heap of knotted fur and blood, while Claw was sprawled out near the stump. A few Clan cats lay in the mud as well, while the four medicine cats rushed around trying to apply cobwebs and give them some kind of seeds. Jaggedtooth was being taken on by three cats, Blackclaw, Tess, and Webfoot. Ice was brawling with Sorreltail and Tawnypelt; her kits were no where to be seen. I assumed Russetfur and Violet offered to keep them until the battle was over. Snake took off out of the camp

with Shadefur and Mousefur snapping at his tail. *You pitiful Clan cats... One day... I will be back...*

The world around me grew fuzzy as the last drops of blood escaped my body. I lay there, trembling in the cold rain. I realized I couldn't move my head anymore. I had grown so weak that I was almost paralyzed. Unable to even call to the medicine cats, I watched the battle continue. *Not like those fox-hearted medicine cats would come to my aid anyway!*

As the Clan cats continued to chase off and kill the BloodClan cats, the world around me disappeared and I soon found myself laying in a misty forest. The wind that blew past seemed to whisper to me. Standing up, I glanced around. There was no sky there, only endless tree tops and darkness. A swirling fog clouded around my paws. The pain in my neck remained, but it wasn't nearly as excruciating as before.

I began to pad toward the sound of voices far off. A deep growl crept up my throat. *I'll get my revenge one day. Those cats haven't seen the end of my wrath, for this was only the beginning.*